

RADICAL FILM CRITICISM AND THEORY

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THE COLLECTIVE

Kass Banning
Scott Forsyth
Florence Jacobowitz
Richard Lippe
Janine Marchessault
Susan Morrison
Robin Wood

DESIGN Bob Wilcox

Arsiné Khanjian in Atom Egoyan's *The Adjuster*

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Mailing Address:
40 Alexander St. Apt. 705
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Canada was once knee-deep in ice; now it's neck-deep in quite something else.

Some folks (with reified tendencies) surprisingly view our present plight as potentially positive, as a privileged site. Canada's disarray, its radical disjunctiveness, its babel of contesting voices, could be credited with being on the cutting edge — we bear all the markers of the "postmodern." Within this episteme the phantom centre has collapsed and gesturing toward sources of identity, towards the grounds of cultural origins, toward the image of home is perceived as a futile gesture. The myth of centre, nationalism's meta-narrative, has been over-run by "other" signifiers of difference: racial and ethnic nationalism, feminist, regional and class allegiances contribute to our shifting ground of reality that can only offer momentary communities and the local. Canada is not one but many and with this comes challenges to official versions and legacies, theoretical and otherwise.

Most folks, however, do not directly benefit from such heady celebrations of hybridity and instability. They daily bear the weight of economic shifts which attend modernity's realization. Canada's economic dependencies are hardly new, yet they have become more clearly realized since the right's ascension. The most recent attempt by the state at nationalist solidification — the Oh! Canada media campaign — offers but one impotent, reactionary effort to reinscribe the myth of unity.

In spite of the ascription that Canadian culture cannot exist — that it is indeed an impossibility — we are witnessing a surge, a "new wave" of filmmaking in this "imaginary" nation. This issue of *Cineaction*, devoted to Canadian cinema, reflects this recent activity. Of course the range and diversity of Canadian cinema is not fully represented; feature filmmaking is certainly favoured over other forms, perhaps because a new generation of filmmakers have come-of-age in the eighties and their development has generated as much promise and excitement as our first wave of independents. Yet it is imperative to note that this surge is hardly representative. Although filmmakers from "emerging" communities (including women filmmakers) are producing more feature films than in any previous decade, their numbers remain wholly disproportionate to their white "fellow" filmmakers.

This issue reflects a range of voices that speak from different locations. And with turf arise various possible dissonances between "Us" and "Them." From the polemical to the theoretical, from third person to direct address, from the nationalist to the internationalist, all attempt, in various ways, to interpret specific identities and images of Canada.

Kass Banning

This issue of Cineaction is co-edited by Scott Forsyth who doesn't believe in postmodernism or Canadas.

Letters

Dear Robin,

I read your article on the films of Oliver Stone (Radicalism and Popular Cinema. *CineAction* 23) with great interest. I would like to make a few comments.

Firstly I would like to point out that *The Hand* is in fact not Stone's directorial debut. This was the horror film *Queen of Evil*, made in Canada in 1973. I urge you to see this astonishing work (also available, in a slightly cut version, under the title *Seizure*) in which so many of Stone's themes are already clearly present. The film's protagonist, novelist Edmund Blackstone (played by Jonathan Frid, an actor with a notable physical resemblance to Stone) lives, like Jon Lansdale in *The Hand* (a film to which this is in many ways a companion piece), in an isolated house with his wife and child. The film begins with the arrival of several guests at the house for what promises to be an impeccably bourgeois weekend which is disrupted by the appearance of three horrific figures, a dwarf, a deformed black mute and the eponymous Queen, who proceed to kill each of the guests and are explicitly identified as emanating from Blackstone's psyche. Like Jon Lansdale's hand, they do what Blackstone subconsciously desires but dare not consciously imagine and the film logically culminates in their driving his wife to commit suicide and attempting (with Blackstone's assistance) to kill his son. The film's ending reveals that all this has been Blackstone's dream, but a dream that causes him to die of a heart attack. Thus Blackstone is, like Barry Champlain in *Talk Radio* and Jim Morrison in *The Doors*, the dreamer destroyed by his own dream (or the artist destroyed by his own creation). This helps to throw particular light on the later works, especially *Talk Radio* in which it can now be seen that the 'voices' which Champlain 'conjures up' on his talk show are more than anything projections of his own fantasies and neuroses (the film also contains a character, Charles, who is clearly an early version of Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*). Additionally Nicole, Blackstone's wife, is among the most intelligently presented female characters in Stone's work to date, the scene of her final night with Blackstone and subsequent suicide being among the most touching moments to be found in the genre. The film, belonging as much to the movement of the horror film in the seventies as to Stone, seems to me to be one of its director's finest and most radical achievements.

By comparison *Born on the Fourth of July* is a thoroughly reactionary film. One might begin by noting that Ron Kovic's claim that the war was fought against "a poor peasant people who have a proud history of resistance, who have been struggling for their own independence for a thousand years" is totally at odds with Stone's presentation of the Vietcong as the usual faceless enemy. A key element to Kovic's development is clearly his accidental killing of a fellow American soldier, something of which he is deeply ashamed. The implicit (never, of

course, stated) attitude, however, is that if the man whom he had quite deliberately shot had been, as Kovic assumed, Vietnamese, no feelings of guilt would have been necessary, and that killing a 'gook' is in no way to be confused with killing a 'man.'

I find somewhat astonishing your statement that "contemporary America... has been discredited in Stone's work with a thoroughness and clarity of which Cimino seems incapable... Stone is by far the more intellectually rigorous of the two, refusing to hide his quandaries under incoherence." Precisely the opposite seems to me to be true, and the assertion that "the America loved by Ron Kovic/Tom Cruise seems even less clearly definable" (than that in *The Deer Hunter*) is simply incorrect, the film's epilogue, set at the Democratic convention in 1976, quite clearly functioning to separate the America that insisted on fighting the Vietnam war from the America of Ronald Reagan. Kovic's final comment that "lately I've felt like I'm home" has a clear ideological function, and just in case we should miss the precise significance of 'home,' Stone intercuts shots from the film's opening small town scenes (including the fourth of July parade and the war games) with shots of Kovic looking ecstatic. While it is true that the film's first 'movement' (to which these scenes belong) "is devoted exclusively to describing how masculinity is constructed in American culture, linking it to power, conquest, aggression, patriotism on the one hand and repression on the other," the repeated use of this material at the film's end is quite different, even contradictory.

This may sound superficially similar to the process by which, in *The Deer Hunter*, *Year of the Dragon* and *The Sicilian*, the thorough and uncompromising critique of the figure of 'the hero' is made to coexist with a view of the hero as magnificent, but it clearly isn't, this being rather a product of Cimino's artistically valid ambiguity, the magnificence of the hero being seen as a given, without recognition of which the idea of the heroic individual cannot be understood (compare Ford's treatment of the cavalry). In *The Sicilian* (surely the finest American film of the last few years) the ability to effect social change is represented by the ring which passes from the Duchess to Giuliano and ends up in the possession of the peasant boy, the film's support for the forces of socialism being coherent, logical and unambiguous. In *Born on the Fourth of July*, by comparison, social change can only result in a return to the values which, in the film's own terms, brought about the situation (Vietnam) which required changing. This is not only incoherent, it is thoroughly idiotic.

Yours sincerely,

Brad Stevens

343, New Bedford Road, Luton, Beds. LU3 2AB England
4/11/91

Women in French-Quebec Cinema

THE SPACE OF SOCIO-SEXUAL
(IN)DIFFERENCE

by Chantal Nadeau



Although national identity defines itself by a rude awakening to the existence of others, it never dwells on the alterity of women. But, in their refusal of reciprocity, in their absence of symmetry, relations to the Other (woman) traverse the field of political issues out of which emerges the larger problematic of identity and difference.

In this article I will raise the ways in which the discourse of identity in Quebec cinema over the last decade has relegated questions of relations to difference to a marginal representation of what is the position of the other-woman in the social. I will examine how this relation to the other-woman, when it is present in representations of alterity in Quebec cinema, takes on the allure of an existential quest for men in which the authenticity of a Québécois subject in its generic sense is endlessly constructed. Thus, and in the context of a *concern for differences*,¹ a vision of Quebec society emerges in low relief, one which is white, male, heterosexual, and which ignores the possibilities of the horizon of the other. Far from limiting itself to what could be called men's cinema, this practice also affects women's cinema, in particular the films of Léa Pool. By evacuating the question of difference not only between but within genders, Pool's films put the alterity of women in an "off-space" position, "the space of socio-sexual (in)difference."²



André Forcier's *Une Histoire Inventée*

QUEBEC IN THE 1980s: THE CRISIS OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

During the 1980s, a series of films wearing the aura of a post-referendum label, a post-quest for something, appeared in Quebec. In these often bitter-sweet comedies about the morning after saturated with the disillusionment of a country which makes no sense, the male protagonists speak of *their* crisis, experienced as a realization of failure: that of an aborted political project (the independence of Quebec), that of an impossible romantic confrontation with the other sex, that of the impossibility of living other than with themselves. The over-exposure of this failure became the pretext for denying that relations to alterity are more than the anguish of one's own self; as the site of difference, they constitute one of the major issues of the crisis of representation that has resonated throughout Quebec society for the last twenty years. In this

order of things, the cinematic representation of women discloses them as the echo of a male speaking subject, eternally faithful companions cast in the silence of occasional partners, a silence which remains in the shadows hovering in the background of the historical, social and personal drama such as it is lived and told by the speaking subjects in the foreground.

Moreover, by means of an irresistible internal logic, the national obsession has become the spearhead for a discourse attempting to define the new status of the Québécois man. In fact, it is less a search for identity that animates films such as *Un zoo la nuit* (Jean-Claude Lauzon, 1987), *Les Matins Infidèles* (Jean Beaudry et François Bouvier, 1989), *Trois Pommes à côté du sommeil* (Jacques Leduc, 1988), and *Rafales* (André

1. Cf., Sherry Simon, "Espaces incertains de la culture," in *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec*, Montreal: XYZ Éditeur, 1991, p. 18.

2. Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," in *Theatre Journal*, 40 (2, 1988), pp. 155-177.



Un Zoo la Nuit by Jean-Claude Lauzon

Melançon, 1990) than a sisyphian search for a holy grail: the patriarchal figure of Quebec society, the one which supposedly liberated the parochial spirit of pre-quiet revolution Quebec. The men in Quebec films are forever discovering in themselves an 'innate' sensitivity for a social and cultural paternity which they stubbornly want to wrench from two centuries of matriarchal rule. (Allow me to point out how much the idea that Quebec is a matriarchy — call this "the Plouffe Family syndrome"³ — has fallen on hard times. If this makes us smile, it is all the more desperate inasmuch as it completely denies the extent to which Quebec women were held under the historical grip of a patriarchal society ruled by the all-powerful mace of the holy trinity: Church-State-Economy.) As such Women appear as veritable foils for a masculine/national identity who keep us from going around in circles, feared figures of a very imaginary epoch.⁴

Thus, the (de)nationalist discourse that emplots a good number of Quebec films shows the extent to which the recognition of the space of identity is under the guardianship of the legitimacy and the authority that a homogenous male class has conferred upon itself: a nationalizing identity which is perpetually brought back to an intimate, closed and claustrophobic space, and which experiences itself vicariously through a panoply of metaphors; metaphors for an identity whose possibilities exist only in the rupture with the other sex, buddy-buddy relations, the revenge of the baby-boomers, and cathartic voyages to the United States (see the film series *Americanité* produced by the French section of the NFB).⁵

I would like to use the term "the eccentric subject,"⁶ an expression employed by Teresa de Lauretis, to designate the position of the other-woman in Quebec cinema. The eccentric subject refers to the placing of the female subject at the margins of various systems of representation circulating in the social. More specifically, and with respect to Quebec cinema,

the inscription of the eccentric subject participates in the process by which cinematography can be defined as a "technology of gender."⁷ In perpetuating and refining the representation of woman as an eccentric subject, recent Quebec cinema perpetuates the traditional discourse that encloses women within a doubly prescriptive relationship to their bodies: the

Pierre Falardeau's *The Party*

3. I am of course referring here to that classic of Quebec literature, *Les Plouffe*, the 1948 novel by Roger Lemelin. The book was adapted to radio, then became one of the most popular series in early Quebec television, and saw its most recent popularization in the 1981 film adaptation by Gilles Carle. *Les Plouffe* recounts the day-to-day life of a working class family from lower-town Quebec City, headed by a nationalist and somewhat resigned father and a mother who rules the kitchen and watches closely over her brood, particularly her three sons. Many historians consider *Les Plouffe* to be a sociologically faithful portrait of urban Quebec of its period.

4. I am alluding to Heinz Weinmann's psychoanalytical-Freudian interpretations in *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois: De la petite Aurore à Jésus de Montréal* (Montreal: l'Hexagone, 1990). Weinmann, in the purest tradition of psychoanalytical-Freudian discourse, shows the extent to which all histories of Quebec cinema are traversed by the imaginary of the family novel, the sublimation of abandon by the mother country (France) and domination by the father (Great Britain).

5. As Simon Harel reminds us in *Le Voleur de Parcours* (Montreal: Les Éditions du Préambule, 1989), Quebec literature is also haunted by catharsis-initiation voyages to the United States, particularly in the novels of Jacques Poulin, *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) and Jacques Godbout, *Une Histoire américaine* (1986).

6. Cf., Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," in *Feminist Studies*, 16 (1, 1990), pp. 115-150.

7. Cf., Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: MacMillan Press, 1987.



silenced other and the visibly different. It is only under this double condition of representing women's bodies that the presence of women on the screen is authorized. But, more than that, by maintaining a representation of the relations to the other as a relation of authority of the speaking/known subject over the eccentric subject, French Quebec cinema constructs itself as the space of socio-sexual indifference. In place of the opening that a recognition of sexual and ethnic differences might suggest, the dominant discourse prefers to impose a triumphant *homo-sexuality* (Irigaray). As such, attempts to insert a pluralism are drowned in a political relativism whose goal is essentially to give the dominant white class a clean conscience without menacing its androcentric position.⁸

The existential quest informing the paths taken by male protagonists in Quebec cinema calls for a discursive collusion between the speaking subject and the knowing subject.⁹ Thus, far from proposing new relations to alterity, Quebec films produced in the last few years have consolidated the centrality of the male subject in the construction of a national identity. In this context, whatever opening existed for a profound questioning of norms, values, ways of thinking and constructing relations of identity was sealed off within a traditional conception of relations of difference, in which it is ultimately the white male heterosexual subject who fixes the prescriptive order of relations to alterity. From this point on, whatever represents the trace of difference is relegated to the closet of unofficial history, under the label of difference with a capital D.

One cannot but be dumbfounded by the triumphant tone adopted by films such as *Le Party*, *Sous les draps des étoiles*, *Les Matins Infidèles*, and *Un Zoo la nuit*. They are triumphant in the sense that the men, even in the anguish of their being, never question the order of traditional power in which they live. Their contestation is directed at the injustice, the rejection and the marginalization reaped upon the individual who is otherwise 'responsible' such as defined by liberal ideology. It can never occur to them that the veritable realm of difference is situated beyond their own individuality: the realm of the eccentric subject, de-centred and exploded: that of women.

In focusing on the masculinity of representation, and in fixing the viewer's gaze on the existential quests of male protagonists, recent Quebec films evacuate the conditions of possibility for the position of the other as a constituent of a Quebec identificatory space. As such, sexual difference operates like shadows in Chinese theatre; the only thing that persists is the existentialist discourse, which articulates itself "behind the wall of private life."¹⁰ The representation of woman as other in these films thus corroborates a political and historical construction that aims at establishing the position of women in the social as a far away, if not invisible, place. Rather than recognizing the specific position of the eccentric subject, Quebec cinema casts men as occupying a double role: the master and the subject. As such, a potential site for the articulation of resistance to and transgression of established order becomes one of exhibition. Alterity is subsumed by codes for the recognition of identity, celebrating the definitive ubiquity of the male subject as the exemplary and global/total territory of identity, difference and alterity.

THE ROMANTICIZATION OF SOLITUDE AND THE NEGATION OF THE OTHER: ANDRÉ FORCIER'S *KALAMAZOO* AND *UNE HISTOIRE INVENTÉE*

The refusal of the other in Quebecois cinematographic discourse largely expresses itself by what Caren Kaplan designates as "the romanticization of solitude and the suppression of differences."¹¹ The process of the "romanticization of solitude" can be distinguished in cinematographic discourse and treatment by the affirmation of a homogenous and unique masculine enunciative position. The construction of a homogenous referent legitimates the subsequent creation of a catch-all category for expressing relations to difference, thereby definitively consecrating the traditionalism of a binary representation in critical and aesthetic thinking.

Concretely, the romanticization of solitude is accompanied by an idealist, if not mythic, representation of woman in romantic relationships. In these representations, women correspond to an allegorical conception of the female body as exotic/erotic. In effect there was a marked tendency from 1980 to 1990 to articulate sexual difference within the modalities of an eroticizing discourse, one in which women are more Woman than woman. At the same time, made accessible anew by an erotic treatment, women become an "inoffensive" and romantic site of far away difference. There is no longer any question of representing woman as enunciating subject; rather, it is a vision of a woman tattooed by the male gaze. Subsequently, the solitude of the Quebec male in cinematographic discourse appears in conformity with the dream it cultivates: an illusion. In this respect, it seems to me that the most telling example of this is the work of André Forcier, particularly his last two films: *Kalamazoo* (1988) and *Une Histoire Inventée* (1990).

In *Kalamazoo*, as in *Une Histoire Inventée*, women are made to appear as the mythic incarnation of the praying mantis. Half-goddesses, half-demons, women have quasi-supernatural, and above all typically "feminine," powers, in particular, the exclusive power of seduction.¹² More than anything else, it is the narcissistic ideal of Woman dreamed about by heterosexual males that transcends the representation of women. The woman in *Kalamazoo* and in *Une Histoire Inventée* wanders about under the guise of a *femme fatale*, a character tintured with a disquieting strangeness, but for whom men literally lose their heads. From the masquerade of Helena Mentana,

8. Elizabeth Grosz proposes an eloquent definition of relativism when she writes: "Relativism amounts to an abdication of the right to judge or criticise a position — any position — and a disavowal of any politics, insofar as all positions are rendered equivalent." Elizabeth Grosz, "Le corps et le connaissances — le féminisme et la crise de Raison," in *Sociologie et sociétés*, Vol. XXIV (1, Spring, 1992), p. 52.

9. On the question of the relations tightly linking the confusion between the speaking subject and the knowing subject, see Elizabeth Grosz, (1992) *op. cit.*

10. Cf., Michele Le Doeuff, *L'étude et le rouet* (tome I), Paris: Seuil, 1989, p. 211.

11. Cf., Caren Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," in *Cultural Critique*, no. 6, 1987, pp. 187-198.

12. For those familiar with Baudrillard, it goes without saying that I am referring here to his 1979 fetish essay *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée). In effect, Baudrillard tries very hard to show that seduction is an exclusively feminine attribute.





André Forcier's
Une Histoire Inventée

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the siren in *Kalamazoo* to the parading of Florence Desruisseaux (40 years — 40 lovers) in *Une Histoire Inventée*, the frontiers of male fantasies impose themselves — the desire of men to erect a woman-statue in their image. Thus, the representation of a unique, evanescent Other, whose sublimated body exists only as a "Self shadow" is inexorably engraved on the screen.

Moreover, in *Kalamazoo*, the double constraint of the visibly different and the silenced other that conditions the representation of women reifies itself in scenes where the (siren) women's voice becomes completely aphonic, substituted by the masculine one of Félix Cotnoir. It is then Cotnoir who "speaks" the other, the women, and who literally gives the words to the female body that he, Félix Cotnoir, wants to hear himself say. Thus, to the atrophied lower body of the woman, to the monstrous fish-tail, is juxtaposed the crudeness of Félix Cotnoir's voice. Capturing well the spirit of reinforcing the space of socio-sexual (in)difference, Forcier imposes an aural homogenization on sexual difference that betrays the visual representation of woman as siren. Herein lies the explicit articulation of a political and discursive legitimization which links the speaking subject and the (male) knowing subject in what I would call a cultural practice of self-contentment.

In *Une Histoire Inventée*, it is the normative power of a relationship to heterosexuality that overlays the carnal contact of women's bodies. The women in *Une Histoire Inventée* are presented as being *in heat*, lusting after the penis, always warring with one another to offer their sensuality to the most enterprising male. While the men form a united front against a common enemy, the women, principally the mother and her daughter, tear themselves and each other apart as rivals in seduction.

Florence and Soledad are the incarnation of the irreducible destiny of all men: that of loving their own image. Florence is not real: she is an erotic mirror in which her forty lovers find reassurance by contemplating themselves. They ejaculate to a memory, by a liaison with her, in the same way they ejaculate watching a pornographic film. In effect, Florence is the guardian of the heterosexual norm: she has the power to heal (induce an erection) the homosexual theatre critic; her presence alone gives the illusion of the irresistibility of male charm. As for Soledad, the inheritor of her mother's power of seduction, she accedes to her noble status by way of rivalry. Her greatest conquest is not *don juan de la trompette*, the only man to have resisted Florence's sexual advances. Rather, it is the breaking of her romantic relation with Tibo so that she too could enter the market of wanton seduction.

The example of *Une Histoire Inventée* illustrates well how there are only eyes for a space for identity defined as masculine in Quebec cinema: that of a homo-sexuality serving to spotlight what should be the territory of national identity. Rather than proposing a politics of "deterritorialization," in which eccentric subjects would participate in an identificatory *mapping*, the discursive representation of genders in Quebec cinema maintains the place of men as the referential space. The space of sexual difference is dispersed in the territory of the stranger, of strangeness, of the impossible representation. Alterity *remains* (I stress) a hatred of the English, the ridicule of the colonized native, the so typical savage (as in "Vue

d'ailleurs," 1991, by Denys Arcand, in *Montréal vu par...*). The territory of difference literally melts into that of the generic Québécois searching for his origins, perniciously commonplace origins where, to be sure, others do exist, but only in the margins, like a reference when the need arises.

In my view, the multiple positions sanctioning the historical status of the other as eccentric subject constitute a major stake in the understanding of the complexity of the debate over identity and difference in society. What feminist theory has put on the agenda of the debate over the representation of the other in the traditional social order, is the implacable urgency of thinking difference within difference. The Other woman is not one, but many. Her relationships to difference are at once an aesthetic and a political relationship. They are aesthetic to the extent that the other-woman is, on the one hand, the object of a specific representation (sexual, racial), and, on the other, the object of a social and cultural representation that questions relationships to legitimacy and authority involving the construction of genders. As Teresa de Lauretis quite justifiably underlines in an attempt to understand how gender (as the marking of sexual difference) is also a representation, it is also necessary to grasp gender as it is deconstructed.¹³ In the same way that gender relations overstep the limits of the female body, the issue of alterity goes beyond the simple one of a typically feminine or masculine essence, thereby permitting the opening up of a debate over the possibilities for difference in an identificatory process.

It is in this sense that speaking of the position of the other from a feminist perspective is precisely to refuse to endorse an exclusively essentialist vision out of which, more often than not, a "romantic" representation of the other-woman emerges. Although historical and psychoanalytic discourses have attempted to marginalize woman as the eternal other, feminist critique can not direct itself to the fact that women are defined as an essence opposed to masculine identity. To the contrary, it must focus on the discursive representations that have contributed to legitimating alterity in a psycho-biological and non-political basis. Alterity is no more biological than existential: it is first and foremost political. It refers to an exotic construction of difference that aims at making the absent body a unique reference: that which the male gaze institutes as the official representation of what woman is. It legitimates an authoritarian representation of sexual and racial difference, the object of which is to consolidate relations of power.

Quebec films perpetuate a discursive politics that wants at all costs to make the space of the other just another enunciative space, one that projects a male subject in temporary exile. Rather than recognizing the gender relations embedded in cinematographic discourses, Quebec "buddy-buddy films" level sexual differences under a universal label. Being other does not entail working in the shadows. To the contrary, it involves confronting the authoritarian construction of one's own sexual difference. The alterity of women must be understood as an event, a veritable socio-political process of inscrip-

13. Thus, "For gender like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contain, any representation" (de Lauretis, 1987, p. 3).



Léa Pool's *La Femme de l'hôtel*

tion of sexual difference. This implies acceptance of the fact that the feminist subject is always in movement, incessantly searching for new sites for speech, for new referential strategies to mark her difference (or non-identity). But this work is not only concerned with women's relation to their own bodies, to her own space, but equally with the relations that link the other-woman to the historical, political and economic conjuncture of 1990s' Quebec society.

THE FILMS OF LÉA POOL: THE OTHER OTHER

What can be said of the work of Léa Pool with respect to the issue of identity and difference in the context of Quebec from 1980 to 1990?

Few women from Quebec can attain "commercial" visibility in the film industry. What is more, it was not until the 1980s that female cinematographers entered the seventh art's mecca: feature length drama. Very few of them number among the chosen: Anne-Claire Poirier, Micheline Lanctôt, Marquise Lepage, and, most of all, Léa Pool. Pool is the female cinematographer who received the most support from the agencies funding the film industry in Quebec during the 1980s. In effect, Pool enjoys a privileged status in Quebec cinematography: five feature length films, a documentary, and a co-directorship, "Rispondetemi," one of the sketches in *Montréal vu par...* (1991). She is the only Quebec film maker to

have her films played in commercial cinemas, while also piercing the festival circuit, a not negligible factor in making the grade.

In light of its success, Pool's work could not help drawing attention to itself, becoming the object of film criticism and academic analysis. In effect, with what little interest there is for the state of dramatic film production in Quebec during the 1980s, Pool is unavoidably one of those upon whom we must rely. Pool's work benefited from a promotional locomotive, so to speak, which operated on two fronts: firstly, the fallout of the feminist movement and its discourse; then, the efflorescence of Quebec cinema in the 1980s in the context of better market conditions (as demonstrated by her last three feature films — *Anne Trister*, 1986; *A corps perdu*, 1988; *La Demoiselle sauvage*, 1991, which were international co-productions), as well as a sharp increase in the production of dramatic films in Quebec.

Whence the ambiguity and the danger of reading too much into Pool's work. As the only woman making feature films in Quebec, Pool is the object of a double recognition — by feminists and by historians, each making her bear, in turn, the mantle and the flame of the harbinger of a Québécois "feminist/feminine" cinema. In this light, her films, securely anchored in a universe of intimacy, willingly anti-engaged and anti-accusatory, defuse all the political and ideological connotations traditionally associated with the feminist documentary film project in Quebec. Others, that is, feminists, hard pressed to find a point of feminist enunciation within a male cinematographic scene, have seen in Pool's work a cinema of the "other",¹⁴ affixed to a universe defined as feminine.

As such, though it has not recognized a true critique of male-female relations in her work, feminist criticism views it as the expression of a conjugation of a cinema at once by, for and with women.

For my part, I prefer to view Pool's cinematic trajectory as a cinema of paradox, continually vacillating between the desire for a "sexual difference" and the representation of a "sexual indifference."¹⁵ Pool's work neatly fits into an existential mode of treating identity, where, in the final analysis, the un-said surfaces as the expression of the apolitical nature of male-female relations. In looking more closely at Pool's films, it is possible to retrace the tensions underlying an enunciative position which, while articulating itself through female characters, paradoxically defines the alterity of women by rendering women's bodies transparent, thereby maintaining the other in an indifferent space.

In this sense, Pool's work agrees well with the spirit of an ideological discourse of a national film product that does not address the issues of difference and identity in Quebec society. At a time when feminism is looking at itself from the inside, when feminism is withdrawing more and more from the public sphere in order to live in a so-called individual private here and now, the discourse on the representation of the other-woman is necessarily paying the price, particularly as it manifested in the construction of a representation that maintains women in an (im)possible and indefinite position.

Whether it is in *Strass Café* or in *La Femme de l'hôtel*, women always appear out of time, out of place, ahistorical, almost immaterial. As such, the refusal to signify place and the confusion of sites of recognition — for example, the obvious appeal of constituting a universal rather than a particular individuality by continually resituating the relationships between characters in a universe



Léa Pool's *À Corps Perdu*

14. Cf., Mary Jean Green, "Léa Pool's *La Femme de l'hôtel* and women's film in Quebec," in *Quebec Studies*, no. 9, 1989/90, pp. 49-62. Though employing some of the same theoretical parameters I am using (women's cinema, alterity), Green argues for the positivity of Pool's films — particularly *La Femme de l'hôtel* — in developing a subversive and feminist gaze in Quebec cinema. For a critical feminist perspective favourable to Pool's work, see also Janis L. Pallister, "Lea Pool's Gynofilms," in Joseph I. Donohoe (ed.) *Essays on Quebec Cinema*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991, pp. 111-134; Denise Pêrusse, "Analyse spectrale autour de la représentation de la femme," in C. Chabot, M. Larouche, D. Pêrusse, P. Véronneau (eds.) *Le Cinéma québécois des années 80*, Montreal: Cinéma-thèque québécoise, 1989, pp. 22-37. See also two essays by Brenda Longfellow dealing with the analysis of feminine writing in the work of Pool, "Feminist Language in *Journal inachevé* and *Strass Café*," in W.C. Wees and M. Dorland (eds.) *Words and Moving Images: Essays on Verbal and Visual Expression in Film and Television*, Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1984, pp. 77-95; and "The Search for Voice: *La Femme de l'hôtel*," in Pierre Véronneau, Michel Dorland and Seth Fieldman (eds.) *Dialogue: Cinéma canadien et québécois/Canadian and Quebec Cinema*, Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1987, pp. 270-281.

15. Teresa de Lauretis explains that "'sexual difference' is the term of conceptual paradox corresponding to what is in effect a real contradiction in women's lives: the term, at once of a sexual difference (women are, or want, something different from men) and of sexual indifference (women are, or want, the same as men)" (1988, p. 155).



Léa Pool's *Anne Trister*

of intimacy — makes the inscription of difference, that is, differences in the relations between the sexes, more and more difficult.

Moreover, in reducing the space of the other to an erotic space, if not to an imagined exile, that is, an identificatory quest which takes the form of a dreamlike expression, Pool's films deny the positivity of the position of woman-as-other for a feminist practice. Her films mask the other — leaving only the "they" ("elles") who infinitely superimpose themselves on their doubles. To be sure, women are present in Pool's films, just as men are, but their representation can hardly be considered as a call for a female gaze, one which would allow for an enunciative strategy likely to break with the conventions of a male gaze.

In sum, the representation of women in Pool's films is such that it strikes me as impossible to say whether her treatment breaks with or at least foils traditional (read stereotyped) references to women in film. To the contrary, when confronted with the romantic triangles in *Anne Trister* (1986) and *A corps perdu* (1988), when one comes up against the nature of the relations between the women in *La Femme de l'hôtel* (1984) and *Anne Trister*, one is much closer to eternal clichés about the dangers of female-female relationships than to a real opening for relations between women.

In Pool's films, though the other-woman is affirmed as the film's subject, she is never affirmed as a social (knowing) subject. Going from *La Femme de l'hôtel* to *La Demoiselle sauvage* (1991), women gradually lose their alterity, ultimately, simply and banally becoming an abstract "other." Henceforth, there are no more classes; there are only cases. There are no longer power relations of men over women; there are only individual tensions in which similar figures are opposed to the Same.

I have discussed elsewhere the extent to which the muting of woman as different subject in Pool's films is related to her representation of sexuality.¹⁶ Whereas in Forcier's films the potency of sexuality explodes in the gaze of the other, for Pool it is more a sexual apathy that afflicts women. The women in her films do not properly speaking have a gendered body. Their sexuality, difficultly assumed, traces itself in a phantasmatic state: that of an identity which, while constantly evoking the frontiers of myth and reality,¹⁷ flirts more easily with the a-temporality of myth. As such, the representation of women is conveyed by an appeal to a universal gaze — that of a single sex where, ultimately, any possibility of inscribing relations of sexuality in a hand-to-hand struggle with the political issue of sexual difference is blurred. Whereas *La Femme de l'hôtel* timidly opened the way for, without ever fully doing so, a certain intention to break from a representa-

tion of woman as transience, *Anne Trister* follows a series of films undoubtedly devoted to a representation of women that flattens the particularism and the specificity of difference. With *Anne Trister*, at the same time as the maternal barriers between Alix and Anne are lowered, a wall of silence is built around a dangerous sexuality — for all intents and purposes it is taboo. With respect to *A corps perdu* and *La Demoiselle sauvage*, the sexuality of women is inscribed well within a conformist (heterosexual) romantic order, having all the appearances of a prescriptive state.

Thus, the women in Pool's films are forever on the verge of disappearing. Their often ambiguous sexuality contributes to maintaining the conception of a feminine nature irremediably confined to the only power available to it: seduction. Though Pool's films occasionally flirt with a transgressive female gaze by hinting at lesbian relations between women (*La Femme de l'hôtel*, *Anne Trister*), they never succeed in providing these women with the possibility of emancipating themselves from their own sexual apathy. Even though two of her most recent films (*Hôtel Chronicles*, *Rispondetemi*) allow fragments of a "said to be" different (i.e., lesbian) sexuality to show through, the position of difference apprehended in its totality, remains hushed, a polite and timid vision of the eccentric other. In this sense, her female characters confine themselves to a reassuring relativism, thereby eluding the possibilities for yielding a representation of the other that is not the incarnation of a neutral, universal subject. As such, so long as the bodies are fluid and the heads interchanged, all is possible. Immediately there follows a series of variations on a single theme — the intimate drama of the existential quest — in which the Other, to be sure, appears human, all too human. Thus, it has to be argued that Pool's films elude the tensions between representation and self-representation of sexual difference in women's cinema.¹⁸ Her refusal to inscribe the other woman at the heart of her filmic practice, to my mind disqualifies Pool's cinema as feminist. As I argued, the representation and self-representation of a woman-as-other promises the reworking of the relations of alterity and difference, differences that must be at the centre of a feminist enunciative position.

Out of these fragmentary discourses on identity, I have attempted to recreate the specific spaces of the representation of sexual difference. Taking from the position of the other defined as "eccentric subject," I want to discern how two practices each distinctly mark a cultural refusal to recognize the conditions of possibility of the other in the representation of identity. Marked by individualist tendencies, the one deploys a dreamlike and imaginary relation to identity (Forcier); the other displays an existentialist relation to femi-

ninity and an errant interiority.

To confront relations of identity and the difference of the position of the other is to recognize, as Deleuze puts it, that "the concept [of alterity] must mean event, and no longer essence."¹⁹ In this sense, to question the relation of identity to the position of the other-woman is to affirm that the representation of the other is constituted in a movement towards something, in the direction of something, and not in the inertia of an authoritarian discourse. Thus, although the representation of difference effectively confronts the ineluctable character of the body's materiality, this representation must equally account for the complexity of the historical, political and social relations that fashion the position of the other-woman in the specific conjuncture of the 1990s. In this sense, it is a matter of thinking the other as a "strategy of reference," that is, "[as]...a value that not only refers to and derives from the political discourses of feminism, but remains open to revision by them."²⁰

16. Cf., Chantal Nadeau, "Les femmes frappées de disparition," in 24 *Images*, no. 56-57, 1991, pp. 60-62.

17. Cf., Pierre Caussat, *De l'identité culturelle: Mythe ou réalité*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989.

18. Cf., de Lauretis, *Technologies...* 1987, *op. cit.*

19. Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990, pp. 39-40.

20. Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*. London & New York: Verso, 1988, p. 5.



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An adaptation
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Sitting in the Dark

by William D. MacGillivray

Last week you, a stranger, were sitting next to me and felt obliged to chip through my little wall of ice by saying, "I've heard about your films, but I've never actually *seen* one..." I am not too good with strangers, so I just looked at you. But, being the kind of person you are, you persisted in an accusing sort of way, "Why *is* that?" Not unlike the aggressively, "So, what was your tumour, malignant or benign?", it's a difficult question to answer. Not that the answer is unknown, it is just so depressing that one prefers to stare and respond with a simple, "Would you mind passing the butter?" As I nervously apply butter to my thumb and forefinger, I swear on Brian Mulroney's grave that I will never make another film.



Understanding Bliss by William D. MacGillivray

Today is another day, I've made yet another film and you have become very insistent. Rather than ask for the butter, I will try to answer your question. Why have you never seen my films?

Within groups there are often sub-groups. Within those still more, and I belong to a very idiosyncratic group within the 'entertainment' industry. We are funded by the Canadian government to try to create the illusion that English-speaking Canada has a strong and vital film and television culture. Chief among the government agencies charged with creating this illusion is Telefilm Canada. The confusion it feels about its mandate can be found in the space between two statements written in one of a series of beautifully bound Plans — this, for the year 1990-1991.

STATEMENT ONE: "Telefilm Canada believes that the television programmes and feature films with which it is associated should reach large Canadian audiences and where ever possible, even larger audiences abroad."

STATEMENT TWO: "Telefilm Canada wishes to ensure adequate funding for Canadian programmes that display a quality comparable to the best independent productions around the world. To this end, Telefilm Canada is seeking challenging projects, innovative in their subject matter, that embody contemporary cinematic values and a strong cinematic vision. Generally speaking, such projects involve distinctive stories, with a strong narrative, that are written and directed by Canadians. Productions that are distinctive and highly innovative provide the best opportunity for success in today's highly competitive environment."

The first statement comes from the left-hand side of the perpetually befuddled Canadian brain. It uses the Harold Robbins theory of qualitative analysis which goes something like this, "I am the world's best living author because I sell the most books." It's difficult to argue with that kind of logic. The second statement comes from the right-hand side of that same unfortunate brain; apart from the notion that the value of Canadian programming can only be determined with reference to the productions of other countries and despite the broad application of cinematic terminology used to define the desirable qualities of both cinema and television, there is implicit in this second statement the curious belief that a Canadian audience will actually respond to innovative subject matter, contemporary cinematic values and strong cinematic vision.

Telefilm Canada seems to believe that Stephanie, the average Canadian film-goer, and her post-pubescent beau, Jason, standing in the local mall multi-plex trying to choose between *Death Squad Exterminator Five*, starring Arnold S. and *Bye Bye Blues* starring someone whose name definitely rings no bells, will turn and say, "Hey, Jase, I'm tired of the reactionary, sexist, violent white supremacist American entertainment we usually eat popcorn to, let's see a distinctively Canadian film with contemporary cinematic values, strong cinematic vision and oh, hey look, it's written and directed by a woman and she's a Canadian, too!" Assuming that such a conversation could occur in any Canadian mall, does Telefilm actually believe that Jason will follow this wise and worldly woman into the obscure darkness that awaits them, both in the theatre and on the screen?

The conflict between Telefilm's right and left hemispheres reflects the essential conflict within the industry itself. The conundrum simply stated goes like this: in the informed, culturally aware world that we illusionists inhabit, the making of a distinctively Canadian programme is a good and honourable thing to do. However, the other twenty-odd million English-speaking Canadians, and the government that 'represents' them couldn't care less. Well, to be brutally honest, they are downright hostile: particularly the government.

The vast majority of the Canadians who 'go to the movies' are between thirteen and twenty-five. Their idea of history is

'yesterday.' Their idea of culture is, in the case of small "c" culture, the Cowboy Junkies as opposed to Madonna. In the case of a large "C" they might turn to one of the cultural venues readily available in Canada. PBS, for instance, is brought to them from Detroit — for a small monthly fee. But this would be unusual because it seems that the vast majority of television viewers are not between thirteen and twenty-five. They are much older.

They are more like the age of our Prime Minister and most of the members of Parliament. Brian and his cohorts are children of the initial, pre-television invasion. Trading comic books in dirty little theatres dotted all over the country, they were raised on values best exemplified by Randolph Scott, John Wayne and, as it turns out, Ronald Reagan. Brian's perception of the workings of our wonderful world was informed by these larger than life, white patriarchs whose mistrust of those who ride a horse of a different colour has become the basis of much of the national and international agendas of the country that created them. Is there any difference, then, between that little Brian of the forties watching a big screen upon which a white man using 'superior' technology shoots an effectively unarmed aboriginal person off a horse on some distant plain and the BIG BRIAN of the nineties watching a little screen, as even more superior technology storms a distant desert's women and children? And wouldn't any little boy who idolized Ronald Reagan give all he had, perhaps even his country, to be a deputy in the Marshal's posse as he ruthlessly hunted down those who live outside the law ...the Marshal's law ...the Marshal's order ...the Marshal's new *world* order? Oh, to be able to blow across the barrel of a smoking gun!

Those whose formative years pre-date the Hollywood invasion of Canada are now far too old to govern. But they are the ones who, in their innocence, opened the gates to welcome the twisted sense of humanity that Hollywood has become and now, fifty years later, the invasion is nearing completion.

And we are one with the alien. In fact, as is widely known, Hollywood considers Canada to be a part of its domestic market. Just another state — a little larger than Texas. Whenever Canadian governments move in the direction of legislating any defense against the importation of American films, the Marshal, through his deputy, bludgeons the idea out of their heads. Brian Mulroney and the millions of people he represents have spent their lives in front of American movie and television screens. They are comfortable with the man with the smoking gun. They accept as a given his right to kill to acquire what he has chosen to be his.

Traditionally, English Canadian cinema, perhaps because it has never had even the remotest chance to be profitable in so hostile a market place, has attracted filmmakers and television producers both in fiction and non-fiction whose world view has quite often tended to be somewhat more complex than Hollywood's. The works they have created have been compassionate and less interested in plots that turn on action and reaction. They have favoured stories that are driven by, and examine the relationship between living, breathing human beings. The question of a 'body count' is seldom addressed when discussing a Canadian film. Nobody who is

interested in making a fortune ever seriously considered Canadian films or Canadian television programming as an investment vehicle. Money can be made in Canada through movies or television, but not with *Canadian* movies or television.

Ours is, as someone noted, an invisible cinema. It has been allowed to have access to a mere 3% of the screen time in Canadian theatres. 97% of the time Canadians are watching Americans and their values. Deputy Brian has shot so many holes through our one public television network that it can't compete with the American channels delivered so efficiently by Canadians on their cable systems and via satellite. Yet it is acknowledged by many that motion pictures and television are the two most important cultural influences in modern western culture.

There was a time, not too long ago, when the process of culturing was more individual. Of course it was not a perfect system, and it could be said that the child was not really a 'partner' in the process; the home, school and church did not allow much in the way of discourse and tended to encourage the acceptance of the world as it 'was.' Somewhere along the line though, culturing was replaced with consuming. Today's children are not 'partners' in their culturing for an even more insidious reason; it happens in front of a machine whose sole function is to convince them to buy something. And if they should stir themselves enough to want a break from the machine, they go to the mall to stand in line behind Stephanie and Jason to buy the right (and the popcorn) to watch Arnold on the big screen as he kills as many inferior people as possible. Their culture, our culture, is now one of consumption and they have lost touch with who they are, and perhaps more important, *why* they are.

We have ceased to define ourselves in our own terms: on the radio, two leaders of the Halifax black community use a movie made in Los Angeles by a twenty-two-year-old filmmaker as a basis for discussion about the meaning of a so-called race riot in their town; a simplistic and romantic Hollywood movie about the mistreatment of the North American Indian is seen as a signal that *our* society is beginning to treat its indigenous peoples with respect; two American women on the big screen assume the absolute worst of all that is male, and embark on a suicidal rampage of violence, sadism, depersonalized sexuality and murder, and it is said that *finally* women in Canada have been given a voice; there is debate over which of the two 'Canadian' anchormen on American television has been the most reassuring during the 'darkest days' of the Desert Storm; and Tony Orlando's yellow ribbons are mindlessly tied on anything that stands erect until *our* 'boys' come home having defended the profoundly irrational and dangerous American ego.

We are denied our say in the changing culture of our nation. Increasingly, we are becoming less tolerant of one another, more violent within our borders, more aggressive outside our borders, more willing to use the minds and bodies of others for our immediate satisfaction. With our steady diet of reactionary, sexist, violent, white supremacist American entertainment (to quote Stephanie) we have become less interested in the relationship between the characters in our Canadian story and, like any good Hollywood



Life Classes
by William D. MacGillivray

movie, more interested in the action...and the uncontrollable reaction.

The Marshal's deputy has taken the law into his own hands. He relishes his power as he wraps his fingers around the warmth of his political pistol. Our body count is starting to climb at an alarming rate as citizen kills citizen with the egocentric frenzy that each has learned is normal. And we begin to believe in the myth of law and order from the top down rather than the bottom up. And we begin to accept confrontation rather than discourse, with violence as an acceptable conclusion to disagreement. And we begin to know, as the marginalized among us have always known, that our democracy is a lie, that power does indeed corrupt and that, perhaps, the only way to regain control of one's life is by denying power to first the deputy and then, perhaps, the Marshal himself.

Brian Mulroney has, after spending many years dismantling the already flawed superstructure of our nation, begun calling for a UNITED CANADA. Is there, in his mind, and now perhaps our own, any difference between this UNITED CANADA and that UNITED STATES? It has been a slower, more subtle occupation than the killing and maiming of hundreds of thousands of another nation's peasantry, but it has been a far more effective occupation. Rather than merely killing our bodies they have made the much smarter, long-term investment of acquiring our souls.

The invasion/assimilation is complete. There are a few details to take care of: the separation of Quebec from Canada, the complete economic ruin of the Atlantic provinces, the transfer of the manufacturing industry from central Canada to Mexico, the total destruction of the family farm, the flooding of the aboriginal home lands, and the complete decimation of the forests. Then — the final switching of our trade, transportation, economic and, of course, cultural axis from

'east/west' to 'north/south.' Not to worry, the Marshal has his deputy working on all of this.

In a huge, plush, darkened, federally funded national cinema, Mulroney's personal, larger than life movie comes to a close. He mounts his horse to ride south to El Dorado, his good works well and truly done. And, because, like his boyhood idol Ronald Reagan, he is now the hero, he turns, smiles and waves good-bye. The audience of twenty-odd million sitting slightly to the north waves back slowly in stunned silence. As the music score subtly dissolves from our national anthem to something more familiar, the audience suspends its disbelief one last time and watches the deputy ride slowly south to join his Marshal. The image fades to nothing, and these not finally unified Canadians sit in absolute darkness trying desperately not to think. A scattered few begin to wonder who they will be — if the lights come up.

Across the street, in a dirty little theatre, there is a dimly projected print of the film I swore I would never make moving across a stained and tattered screen and I am arriving to engage my audience in discussion. On my way into the house, I notice that the film is grinding along toward its final frames and the projectionist has fallen asleep in the booth. My eyes adjust to the darkness and I try to judge how many people might have chosen to see this curiously 'foreign' film. The credits come to a close, the house lights come up and I stand to face my audience. There are three people sitting in front of me. One is a graduate student. Another is her professor of film studies. The third is a representative of Telefilm Canada making sure that 'the mandate' is being fulfilled. He is not impressed with the numbers and will make a full report to the distribution section.

Oh yes, in answer to your question. You are *not* there. You are sitting in the dark — across the street.



Symptoms of Canada

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE THEFT OF NATIONAL ENJOYMENT

by Kieran Keohane

The problem of Canadian national unity is one of identification: i.e., of leading a diverse collectivity to a mutual recognition of a shared relationship to something called "the Nation." We cannot say what this Nation-Thing "Canada" is exactly, but we say that it manifests itself or that it finds expression in "our way of life." This is true of identities in general. If you ask me what it is that makes me Irish, or I ask you what it is that makes you Canadian, we find that 'it's hard to say, exactly,' so we resort to listing to each other unique aspects of "our way of life": our food, our music, our customs, our festivals, our forms of recreation, and so on. What we relate to one another are the ways in which our enjoyment is organized; the unique things that we enjoy, that others do not have. The "way of life" of an ethnic group, a community, or a nation, takes the form of an articulated constellation of bits of enjoyment: a discursive construction articulated around a central void; a Thing that resists definition. While it is impossible to say what this Thing is essentially, it is definitely there, because we can readily point to cultural practices where it is apparent as "the real thing" or "a Western Thing," some Thing that is "just SO Toronto." At Caribana last year "Island pride" was expressed in similar terms. Trinidadians sported T-shirts with the logo "It's a Trin. thing. You just wouldn't understand." Membership is about having a shared relationship to this Thing; a Thing that exists only as enjoyment incarnated. The discourse of Canadian nationalism is concerned with Canadian National Enjoyment. It is an antagonistic discourse because it is charged with allegations of theft, a theft of enjoyment. This charge of theft is voiced most explicitly at the moment by the Reform Party. A party spokesman at a recent convention in Toronto began his address by saying: "Canada is being stolen from us. It's being stolen by Quebecers, by Ottawa bureaucrats, and by ethnics who won't join the mainstream" (W. Gardiner, Reform Party convention, Markham, April 16th, 1991).



The theme of theft of identity/enjoyment is not solely a concern of the Reform Party. It is central to the discourse of nationalism in general. According to the national anthem we are always "stand(ing) on guard" against possible threats to our way of life. Someone or something is constantly threatening to "steal" our enjoyment. The Free Trade Agreement is discussed in terms of whether and in what ways it threatens our Canadian enjoyment — will the U.S. drain our economy, take our jobs, suffocate our culture? People who oppose immigration most often do so because they fear that it will alter the ethnic composition of the country, and thus "endanger our way of life." And yet when we ask what is "The Canadian way of life?" it proves impossible to give anything like a definitive answer. The best we can do is to give examples of cultural practices which are "typically Canadian," as for example are portrayed in the lifeworld of the characters Bob and Doug McKenzie on SCTV (eh!) or in the advertisements for Molsons Canadian beer; i.e., the advertisements which begin: "In Canada, on Saturday night (on weekends, in winter) young people indulge in a unique ritual. it's called 'strutting your stuff' ('opening the cottage,' 'going out with the boys'). The ads then depict 'typical Canadiana' doing 'uniquely Canadian things': dancing at a Cool Queen St. club; unloading a canoe, chopping firewood, buying ice, cottage-ing; skiing, skating, tobogganing, hanging out at the campsite, and so on. The ads conclude: "Molsons, Canadian: what beer (read 'what being Canadian') is all about."

What is interesting about these advertisements is that they inadvertently show the hollowness, the original "Lack" (of meaning) which underpins the identity "Canadian": it is nothing "essential": it is a contingent precarious identity;

something socially constructed; a hegemonic construction; constructed in this instance by Molsons' advertising department. Identity is a constellation of elements articulated together as moments of a discourse. Discursively produced identities are contingent, and ultimately precarious, because the elements of which they are comprised may be subject to different competing (antagonistic) articulations. The elements of the discourse are ultimately arbitrary. One doesn't necessarily have to be Canadian to engage in the activities depicted in the ads, does one? Americans, Swedes, Japanese, or just about anyone might enjoy the same things. And we can also imagine Canadians who don't enjoy these things but who are still Canadians. One could imagine other articulations of "what Canada is all about": a portrayal of the enjoyment of Afrofest, Caribana, or the enjoyment of various Others not represented in the dominant articulations: a representation of life (existence/enjoyment(?)) on a Native Reserve; a wife beaten up by a drunken husband; isn't that equally "what beer (read "what being Canadian") is all about?"

IDENTITY/ENJOYMENT AND ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONALITY

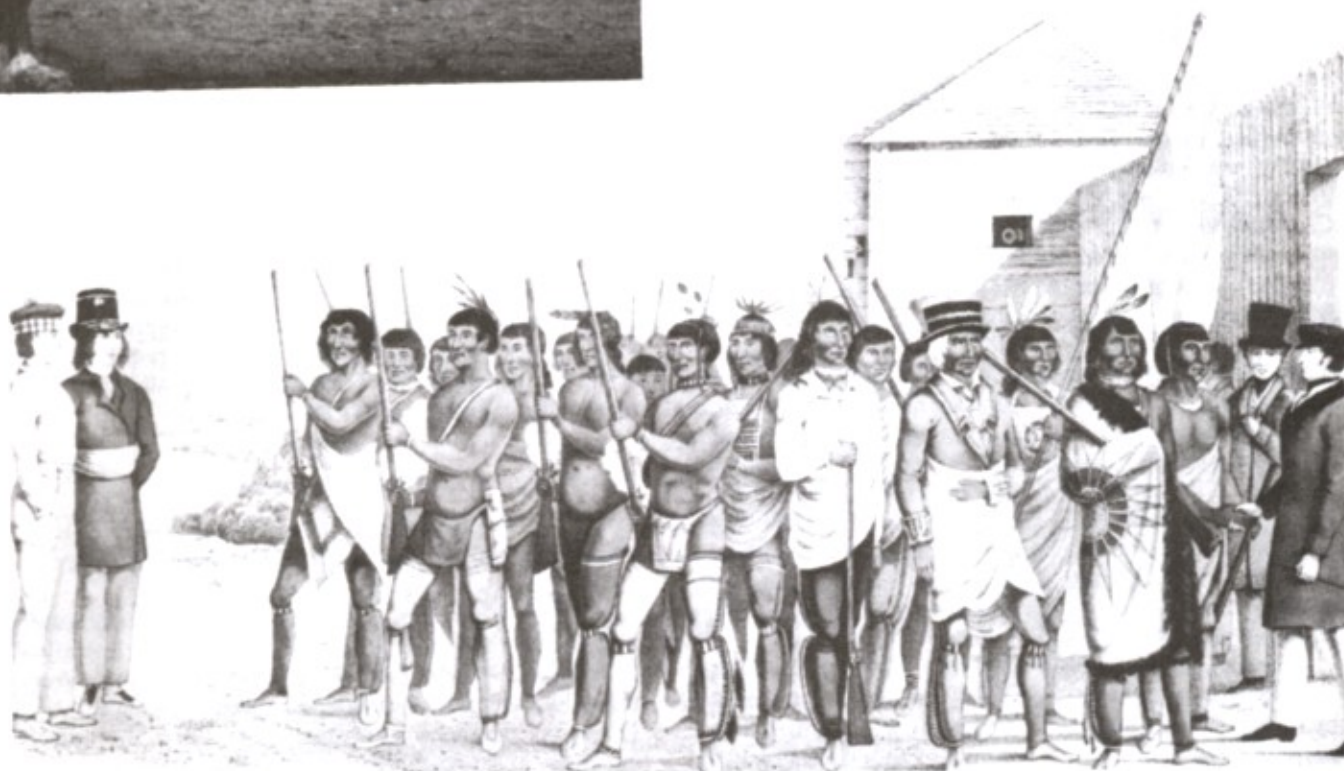
The identity "Canadian" or "Quebecois" is given relationally. It is a socially constructed, historically contingent identity. Its integrity as an identity is derived from its antagonistic relations with other identities. Identities, such as "Canadian" and "Quebecois" are hegemonic discourses. That is, they are contingent historical articulations of diverse elements, the integri-

ty of which depend upon their antagonistic relations with other identities. The identity "Canadian" is given by the ways in which it is "not-like-the-U.S."; "Quebécois" by an enumeration of its differences from "the-rest-of-Canada." Identities have no essence, no transhistorical fixed meaning. They are not precarious and elusive. The identities "Canadian" and "Quebécois" are floating signifiers, and for exactly this reason, their temporary, un-Real nature they are hotly contested and fiercely defended.

There are several important axes of relationality across which the current Canadian identity crisis is constituted. The most prominent of these are the identity relations Canada/U.S., Quebec/the Rest of Canada, Canada/Native peoples, and Canada/ethnic groups or immigrants. While these axes of problematic relationality appear and are articu-

lated politically as distinct problem complexes, they share a basic dynamic.

The salient differences in the project of identity construction and maintenance are those of "enjoyment," i.e., the fragmented and various practices, languages, symbols and rituals, which are laid claim to as the "unique" aspects of "our way of life"; something which "we" have which "they" do not; which "we" enjoy and which "they" cannot understand nor appreciate. But possession of national enjoyment is tenuous; "they" always pose a threat to it: their difference threatens to steal our enjoyment. Americanization threatens to steal our Canadian enjoyment of crime free cities and harmonious ethnic relations. Their "culture industry" threatens to rob us of our Culture. Their unfettered market forces would steal the enjoyment of our medicare system, our seniors' retirement plans, and so on. The Rest of Canada threatens to steal Quebec's enjoyment in the same way: it does not (cannot, some would say) appreciate Quebec's "distinctiveness." The Rest of Canada frustrates the Québécois project to be "maitres chez nous." English creeps into the Quebec vernacular, stealing Frenchness. A sign inspectorate and language police is needed to keep the thief at bay. Meanwhile, elements in the Rest of Canada feel that Quebec is stealing its enjoyment: bilinguals and francophones allegedly get preferential treatment in employment. Quebec, say Maritimers, gets more political clout and proportionately more than its fair share of Federal transfer payments than the neglected Maritimes. Vampirish Quebec feeds on the rich black oil blood of



Alberta. Hydro-Quebec's mega projects in James Bay steals Natives' traditional lands. The enjoyment of our shopping, even of our breakfast bowl of bran flakes, is somehow infringed upon by bilingual packaging!

The most general formulation of the problem of antagonistic relationality and identity is Hegel's discussion of the master and the bondsman. The master depends upon the bondsman for his own freedom, i.e., for the constitution of his own identity as master. But in his practice of turning the bondsman into an object he is objectifying himself simultaneously, as self consciousness is the return (reflection) from otherness: the master and the bondsman are unequally unfree. While the bondsman is complicit in his subjugation he participates in the action of the master, i.e., he makes an object of himself, and his becoming a being-for-himself depends upon his engaging in a struggle "to the death" against the master, by which the bondsman frees both himself and the master from their relation to one another as objects. For Hegel the achievement of being-for-self can only be released in dialectical struggle. The independent shape has no being in-itself. It must "subject its existence to the infinity of the difference." "The supercession of individual existence through the fluidity or general dissolution of differences produces individual existence. When a being itself (simple existence) places the Other within itself, it supercedes the simplicity of its essence. In order for this supercession to take place there must be an Other. Being itself must proceed to supercede the Other independent being in order thereby to become certain of itself as the essential being, ...in so doing it proceeds to supercede its own self, for this Other is itself" (Hegel, "Self consciousness: the truth of self certainty" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp 107, 108, 111).

A complementary formulation of this dynamic is derived from the psychoanalysis of Lacan by Žižek. Namely, the problem of relationality with the Other is that the Other is always already part of the One. This is so because without the Other there is no One: the One is the original Lack. The Other is hated and feared because its presence threatens to reveal this original lack. Hatred and fear of the Other is, therefore, hatred and fear of the self. Hatred and fear of Quebec's distinctiveness reflects a fear and hatred of the rest of Canada's lack of distinctiveness.

What is hated and feared about the Other is the Other's "Enjoyment"; i.e., how the Other's existence is animated. Why is this Enjoyment of the Other feared/hated? The enjoyment of the Other shows the contingency, precariousness, or the absurd improbability of the enjoyment of the identity of the One. In other words, the existence/enjoyment of the Other constantly reminds us of the Lack, the semantic void at the heart of the social and underpinning our own existence/enjoyment. It does this by presenting and confronting the One identity with the infinitude of alternative forms of enjoyment, showing that the form of life, the Enjoyment, the ways in which the existence of the One is animated, is simply one way of an inexhaustible number and variety of ways of existence. It shows that "our way of life" is not the only way; that there is no way of saying that it's the best way; that our existence/enjoyment is, or may be, absurd, improbable and meaningless. The presence of the Other is therefore a constant

source of existential angst.

The social is constituted as an antagonistic forcefield of relationality between contingent articulations of identities around a basic paradox: that the integrity of identity is contingent upon the identification of elements which are not-the-identity; i.e., a field of Otherness, outside of the identity which stands in antithetical relation to the identity. These Other elements simultaneously both constitute and negate the identity: that is, while they are necessary for negatively defining the identity (i.e., the One is not-the-Other), they are simultaneously a threat to its integrity. How is this so? Because the original identity is a contingent historical construction, a precarious constellation of (what are ultimately arbitrary) elements, in other words, the identity has no essence that gives it transcendent Being outside of a particular socially constructed historical context. This original Lack (lack of essence, lack of fixed meaning) is the traumatic kernel of social existence. The presence of Otherness is a constant reminder of this Lack, and thus is a source of existential angst and anomie. The enjoyment of a historical identity, i.e., the innumerable social practices, languages, signs, codes which animate a particular identity, is constantly under threat of being stolen away by the necessary coexistence of Otherness, because the enjoyment of the Other, or, rather, the infinitude of the difference apparent in the Other's enjoyment, an infinitude which appears as the other's excess enjoyment, exposes the arbitrariness and contingency, the improbability, precariousness and fragility of the enjoyment of the One. Because of this the Other is feared and hated, and attempts are made to annihilate it. But this fear and hatred is a projection, or a displacement, because what is actually feared and hated is the lack, the absence of the real underpinning the existence of the One. And campaigns to annihilate the Other, because they would simultaneously result in the annihilation of the One, are practices of self hatred.

At the same time, this very infinitude of difference apparent in the enjoyment of the Other, the excess of enjoyment which is the source of angst and fear for the One, also constitutes the terrain or the space into which the enjoyment of the One can be extended and grow. We hate the other for their excessive enjoyment, and we desire the other for their excess enjoyment. Canadians express dislike of Americans in terms of their being "excessive." Americans are allegedly crass and vulgar. They overconsume shamelessly and are untidy in their enjoyment. They are obese, loud, wasteful, arrogant and "out of control." Quebecers are disliked because of their excess "Frenchness." Their language is exclusive. They are promiscuous, sexy, seductive. Their culture is too rich: ("Rest-of")-Canadians point to Quebecer's penchant for dining out in boulevard cafes; all the sugar and confectionery that they eat; how they drink; wine and beer in corner stores, bars open to three a.m.! Their public spaces, their cities are excessive: all those night clubs in Hull, just across the river from orderly Ottawa. Canadians contrast cold, anal retentive Toronto with lively Montreal, which has that ever-so-slightly-decadent (and alluring) excess, cosmopolitan Parisian pretension. In the discourse of racism, immigrants too are disliked in terms of their excessive enjoyment: their strange exotic customs, their large families, their laziness, their promiscuity. We accuse

them of loafing around, drinking beer and smoking drugs, stealing our women and corrupting our youth. Recently Asian immigrants have been constructed in terms of an excess of crime, more precisely, of an excess of criminal enjoyment. Chinatown, we are told, is run by secret societies. Organized crime organizes a perverse Oriental enjoyment — drugs, gun-running, protection rackets for restaurants and clubs, prostitution rackets, speak-easies and gaming houses. Asian gangsters are portrayed in terms of their excess enjoyment — they all drive Porsches, keep women (possibly even white women!) as slaves, rule over empires, and so on.

But it is this very excess which pertains to the other's enjoyment which constitutes the object field of desire. The Same qualities which we hate in the Other are those qualities which we envy, which we desire. Canadians desire Americans' supposedly higher standards of living, lower taxes, greater control over their elected representatives. The Reform Party, for example, is a vehicle which structures Canadian desire in terms of a fantasy of Americans' excess enjoyment. The Reform Party pursues this fantasy by constructing an electoral platform on the argument that if Canadians could have Americans' excess enjoyment — their taxation system, their system of government — it would fill our Lack. We would have a new national enjoyment; Preston Manning's "New Canada." But of course American enjoyment is no more secure than ours. Americans fret that their enjoyment is being stolen by Japanese competition, by drugs, by Blacks and Hispanics, and they must periodically engage in spectacular lynchings of thieves such as Noriega and Saddam Hussein to allay these fears. The fulfillment of the Reformers' desire, the overlapping of two lacks, cannot constitute the Real: there will still be a Lack. Manning's "New Canada" will be under threat of being stolen away by other Others, and so Reformers also fight "feminists and homosexuals" who are allegedly stealing the enjoyment of our nuclear families, "low [sic] Blacks and Hispanics" and "bogus refugees" who steal our houses, services and welfare, and "ethnics who don't join the mainstream." The desire for national enjoyment cannot be satisfied; it is always under threat by some Other. The magic knot of nationalism, tightening to squeeze out the thieves of enjoyment, tightens until it disappears. It cannot grasp the void.

Otherness constitutes the field of adventure which sustains the vitality of the enjoyment/existence of the One. Otherness is the object domain of desire, the fantasy space of growth and development. Relations toward the Other are always ambivalent. At one and the same moment the Other is articulated as the thief of Canada and simultaneously as constituting Canada. Quebec and bilingualism makes Canada Canada, vis à vis the U.S. Similarly, immigrants bring diversity which adds to our national enjoyment, our "mosaic" which we proudly differentiate from the unwholesome stew of the



"melting pot." Caribana, Thai food, and the bustle of Chinatown become integral parts of Canadian enjoyment.

One aspect of this growth into the field of otherness is becoming to know itself from its reflection from otherness; where, in Lacanian terms, we seek from the Other affirmation of our enjoyment and thus hide the Lack from ourselves. Canadians derive enjoyment, i.e., have their enjoyment affirmed, certified and approved as authentic as it were, by seeing immigrants become more like themselves, but, note, not indistinguishable, not the same as themselves. The difference must persist in order that the reflection is from the Other. A refugee settlement organization in Toronto currently runs an ad inviting Canadians to play host to new arrivals. The slogan runs "Show a new Canadian what us old Canadians are made of" (i.e., have someone from a foreign country tell you how nice you are and what a wonderful country you've got). White anglophone Canadians get a kick out of seeing Blacks and Asians skating and skiing, asking

them whether they have ever seen snow before, whether or not they will ever get used to the cold, and so on. The satisfaction derived is from the contribution of these interactions toward fulfilling the desire to fill the lack (of meaning) through seeing the other enjoying the enjoyment of Canadian life. Thus Preston Manning would (have us believe, at least, that he would) welcome immigrants regardless of race or creed. "Immigration," says the Reform Party, "has been and can be again, a positive source of economic growth, cultural diversity, and social renewal" (i.e., immigration is welcome when it contributes to our national enjoyment). "The Reform Party stands for the acceptance and integration of immigrants into the mainstream of Canadian life" (whatever that is!) and "The Reform Party supports the principle that individuals and groups are free to preserve their cultural heritage, using their own resources" (i.e., immigration and difference is welcome to the extent to which it satisfies our desire to have our enjoyment confirmed). Quebec separatists' approach to immigration is exactly the same: "We welcome immigrants to the extent to which they shore up and protect Quebec's enjoyment" (i.e. that they are francophone and economically productive). "We accept difference only to the extent to which immigrants join the mainstream of Quebec society" (learn French, educate their children through French, settle in Quebec, etc.).

But the dialectical encounter with the Other is never only on terms dictated by the master. The encounter with the other is antagonistic, and in placing the other within the self, subjecting the identity to the infinity of the difference alters the identity. The dialectical encounter is played out in terms of wars of position, the conduct and outcome of which is undetermined, though the stakes are quite clear: at stake are the identities of the antagonists, where "they" become more like "us" and "we" more like "them."

The current and coming phases of the war of position are, I would argue, characterized by hegemonic struggles over enjoyment. The central frontier of antagonism will be one of "defending and recapturing our enjoyment which is being stolen by the other," versus "developing a new form of enjoyment." On the one side of this frontier is a conservative agenda involving finding the Other, scapegoating the Other as thief of our enjoyment, and re-defining or identifying the new community in contradistinction to it. Although by no means exclusive to it, this is most clearly the agenda at the core of the Reform Party's project, expressed in its manifesto *The trouble with Canada*, and in its policies on federalism, bilingualism and multiculturalism. For the Reformers the Nation-Thing "the real Canada," "our way of life," "the Canadian way," "how we see/do things here" is constructed hegemonically as something which has become occluded and polluted; which is in effect being stolen away from us, by "Quebec," by "ethnics who do not assimilate," by "bogus" refugees, by "Ottawa bureaucrats," by "radical anti-family feminists" and a host of other Others.

As I have indicated above the witch hunt for the thief of enjoyment is echoed in Quebec, amongst Natives, amongst racial and ethnic minorities, and many groups who feel, with varying degrees of justification, that they are not getting their fair share of the action in Canada as it is currently constituted.

And, as I have argued, while they accuse each other of the theft of each other's enjoyment, paradoxically they look to the secret, excess enjoyment which they impute to the Other as the object domain of their desire; the source of the restoration of their enjoyment. "Who holds the key to the resolution of the national identity crisis; who can restore our enjoyment: they can, those same others who are stealing it." Clyde Wells, for example, says that if Quebec's excess enjoyment was shared, if Quebec would accept that the other provinces were as equal as itself, then we would be happy. If only the Rest of Canada had as strong a sense of identity as Quebec has, then the country would not be breaking up. On the other side, Quebecers say that if only we had that excess enjoyment of political power which the (Federal government of) the Rest of Canada enjoys — a quasi sovereign distinctiveness, more control over immigration, more control over the Federal budget, more clout on the Supreme Court, power of veto on constitutional amendments — i.e., the enjoyments denied/stolen from us at Meech Lake, then we would happily be part of Canada. Both Quebecois and rest-of-Canadians say, if we all only had that special relationship with the land which we suspect Natives of enjoying, even though those same Natives deny us our enjoyment of golfing at Oka, and by their pitiful drunkenness embarrass us out of enjoying our city streets, then we would all have a sense of place. If only we had the prosperity of the Americans, even though that prosperity is stealing our jobs, guzzling our resources, and would leave us to die on the sidewalk and beg in the streets, there would be no problem. The same ambivalence and paradox is at the heart of the talk about immigrants in the nationalist discourse: If only we had the drive and the discipline of the Japanese, the industriousness and resourcefulness of the Chinese and the Asians, the easygoing-ness and the "soul" of the Hispanics and Blacks, those very people who are making our houses unaffordable, taking our jobs, scrounging our welfare and making our streets unsafe, then we would not be in this mess.

The threat of discarding the Other, bidding adieu to the Rest of Canada, letting go of Quebec, shutting the door on immigrants, is a potent but empty threat. There is no letting go. The centrifugal forces which we fear will cast asunder reflect more the increased tempo of the spiral dance of the dialectic in which the oppositional Others are mutually bound. They cannot release each other, because (a) they depend upon the presence of one another for their integrity, and (b) their boundaries and frontiers have been melted into one another. No sooner are the lines of solitude reestablished than they are melted away again by the heat of the antagonistic friction of the wars of position. What gets sucked into the swirling vortex of the dialectic and melted down are those elements of the symbolic orders of outdated enjoyments: Mounties' hats and uniforms, oaths of loyalty to the Queen, Surete du Quebec police cars, ignorant stereotypes of Natives, racist and sectarian institutions, "Official-language" barriers and an artificial multiculturalism that produces hyphenated Canadians, reified traditions as artifacts and controlled commercialized spectacles. What is released and generated is a sumptuously rich, lusciously fruitful pastiche; a symbolic order representing a new enjoyment — the work of Michael

Ondaatje, Thomson Highway, Daniel Lanois, Deepa Metha, Jean Pierre Lefebvre. The new enjoyment finds space, and grows — on St. Denis, in Kensington, on Queen St. It grows, but does not thrive in hot-housed and enforced conditions: staged and gawked at by the curious in the confines of ethnic clubs during Caravan, or, when, like Caribana, it is escorted along the Gardiner expressway by police with practised smiles, kept at a safe distance from the city lest its exuberance prove infectious. But it flourishes in restaurants and coffee shops, bars, clubs and speakeasies, in neighbourhoods, schoolyards and baseball diamonds. Its growth is agonal and terrifying, often violent, sometimes sputtering out in the dimness of a crack house, sometimes lying bloodied on the sidewalk. The space of the new enjoyment must be, and is, fought for — on the steps of the Royal Ontario Museum, at the doors of night clubs and on the streets of Halifax. It struggles for space in art galleries and on bookshelves, for elbow room on the streets, a fair crack at the whip in the workplace, for a place to eat, sleep, laugh, love and die: for a place to call home, a site of enjoyment/existence.

The national identity crisis is anxiety laden because of a lag or a slippage between the melting down of the old symbolic order and the production of the new. Canadians become aggressive and divisive over Mounties' hats and mug-shots of Her Majesty, ironically because they claim them to be symbols of unity in a country where such symbols are relatively scarce. Undoubtedly they are, or rather were, symbols of national unity, but pertaining to unity under a dominant hegemonic order that is rapidly disintegrating. Outdated symbols of exclusive disunifying enjoyment are vanishing, leaving a yawning chasm. Canadians catch a glimpse of the abyss. Who are we, what are we doing here, are we enjoying ourselves? We desperately try to fill the gap, to cover the lack as quickly as possible. It seems to me that the lack cannot be covered solely by legislation, by legal rational institutions such as the Charter or medicare. Unfortunately, human rights, hospitals, and pensions just do not turn people on. The stuff of desire which can fill the lack must be amenable to fantastic construction; it must be sublime. It must be sexy, heroic, majestic and wonderful, but in new ways; able to fuel the fantasies of a very diverse spectrum of people. We need some new sublime objects of identification and we need to do new takes on our old ones. We need to work on, revise and produce a Canadian tradition.

In light of this the possibility arises for a Federal administration to promote the production of the sublime objects of identification, the symbols which would represent and give order to a new hegemonic project. Such symbols would act as nodal points, points de capiton, around which the elements could be articulated that would quilt the new social fabric; that would give form to a new organization of enjoyment; a new imaginary of community, or imaginaries of communities, radically different, but not "marked" in subordination to any centre. In other words, an appropriate project of political leadership at the present juncture might be to foster a new political economy of cultural production and distribution, to actively seek out new symbols and artifacts representing the new enjoyment. This may well be an urgent task of political leadership if one is concerned that Canadians increasingly

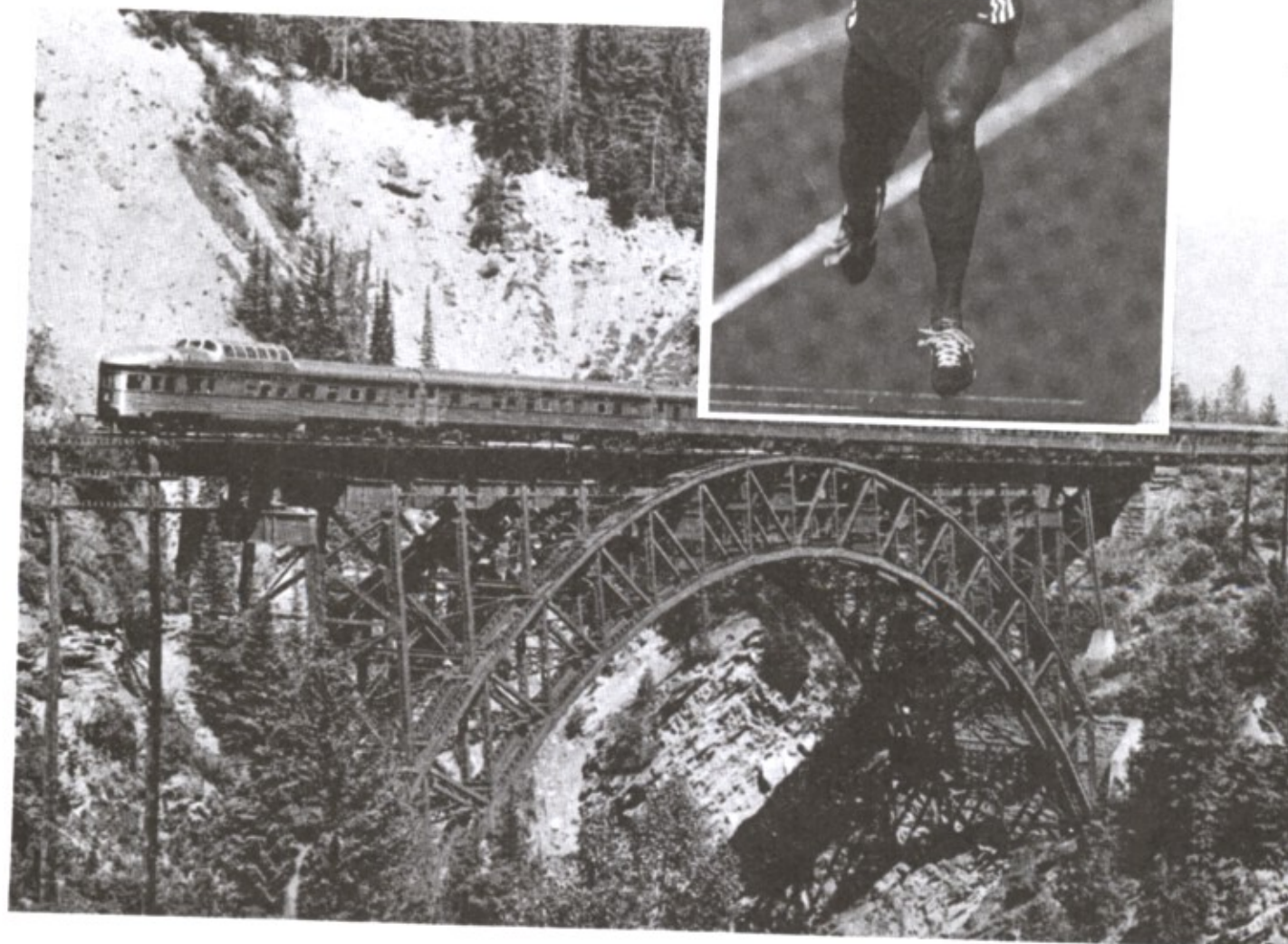
tend to pursue their desire to fill the lack, to construct their fantasy in terms of the object domain of the United States — shopping, vacationing, watching t.v. and vicariously fighting the Gulf War; tending towards identification with the Other as a strategy for dealing with the trauma of the lack.

Such a project is not difficult to conceive. One tactic might be a vigorous pursuit of internationally visible spectacles spotlighting Canada. In an example which Canada might follow, Spain hopes that the Barcelona Olympic Games will knit Catalunya, one of Spain's many equivalents of Quebec, more firmly into the fabric of the nation. Canada might cultivate some heroes. Ben Johnson was one, placed under tremendous pressure to merit the pedestal on which he was forced to stand as a sign of the Nation, and when he fell, a victim of the strain of our focused national desire, the frustrated rage of a nation anxious about its impotence was vented upon him. A Federal government might give more resources and sponsorship to artists. Commissioning works which seek to represent the new community, inviting forums of artists, and public forums from across the spectrum to conceive of representations of our collective enjoyment. There were traces of this in the Spicer Commission. Keith Spicer intuitively appeared to know what was needed — a poetry of the Nation. He should have been given free reign to find it or to let people write it. Instead any poetry was apparently ruthlessly snuffed out by the cold eye and the mechanical hand of the bureaucracy. People urgently need such a poetics, a symbolic representation of enjoyment. We grope frantically to represent our enjoyment, sometimes with ludicrous results: the world's biggest goose (Wawa), the world's biggest moose (Moose Jaw), the world's biggest nickel (Sudbury), the world's biggest perogie! currently under construction outside some prairie town. Edmontonians have a cathedral of consumptive enjoyment, the world's biggest shopping mall, and Torontonians proclaim their enjoyment to the world with the twin absurdities, the world's tallest free standing erection and the world's largest moving structure. While some of these sublime objects unequivocally proclaim a nightmarish state of corporate technocratic excess and aesthetic wasteland it is inappropriate to scorn them, as they also represent an investment of desire in a search for pride and identity. Giant perogies and soaring concrete penises from the top of which you can see New York are fantasy vehicles which structure desire for many ordinary Canadians. The question which Federal Canadian leaders might ask is whether and how should they intervene in the realm of fantasy. It has been done before with some success — the Maple Leaf flag replaced the red ensign, "O Canada" replaced "God Save the Queen" as the national anthem. Both are artificially fabricated nodal points of the symbolic order representing the new enjoyment. Granted they are not entirely successful as the sublime objects of inclusive national fantasies, but they are to a surprising degree. Is it possible to cultivate more? The train, a modern fantasy vehicle par excellence, and one which literally and metaphorically ran like a central thread through the entire fabric of Canadian society, might have been used as it is in Europe to draw together London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt, etc. in the patchwork of the European Community. Instead, the national vandal, the most unpopular elected leader in world history, cut it up.

Perhaps want of leadership and bureaucratic unwieldiness makes it likely that a project of a new political economy of culture emanating from the top down would be counterproductive. Is there an alternative strategy to reconstitute national enjoyment? It strikes me that the alternative is already being pursued. Canadians are already working out the problem of national identity, in the streets, in the workplaces, in bars and in bedrooms across the country where racially and ethnically mixed neighbours and lovers struggle for mutual respect, constituting the terms of a new enjoyment on an everyday basis. The stakes for a new political economy of culture are already being fought for in the wars of position for inclusion in the new Canada. Perhaps a hegemonic task is one of articulating the elements to form an imaginary where difference would be radically antagonistic. A hegemonic project of the new left might be one of NOT forming a new community, but actively de-forming hegemonic projects of imaginary construction; resisting efforts to foist upon the social versions of "community" invariably based on excluding some Other(s) existing as elements within that very community. The hegemonic task may be one of continuing the practice of preventing the suturing of the social, and subverting the efforts at totalization; preserving the dynamism of radical indeterminability.

SYMPTOMS OF CANADA: The Enjoyment of Endurance

"Society doesn't exist," Zizek says, "and the Jew is its symptom." In other words, "society" is a precarious constellation of discursive formations, suspended in an infinite space/time continuum, carved out of a field of differences, and all of our most determined efforts to suture or to totalize the social, from rigorous modern science, to pervasive commodification and bureaucratic administration, are doomed to failure.



Ernesto Laclau concurs: "any structural system...is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it is unable to master, ...consequently "society" as a unitary and intelligible object that grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility." For this reason, say Laclau and Mouffe, we need to study not what society is, but what it never is able to become. The Jew, as the historical scapegoat for these failed projects of suturing and totalization, all the futile efforts to domesticate the field of differences, is the symptom of this non-existence and impossibility of society.

Similarly, one might say that Canada doesn't exist, and that the Sikh Mountie is one of its symptoms. The Nation/Thing is a void around which enjoyment is structured and organized. I have outlined three faces of the hegemonic projects responding to the non-existence of Canada: (a) The reactionary nationalism of the Reform Party and Quebecois separatists, who are attempting to force the Nation into positive existence through a hard, conservative suturing of the social. (b) The Liberal, centrist project, which broadly collects the three main political parties in an effort to practice a looser suturing, a suturing around an 'implant' (a revised Constitution, a Social Charter) but which faces the political,



hegemonic task of investing it with sublime qualities so that it fills out the gaps in the symbolic order. (c) A radical subversion of attempts at suturing the social, a project which — come to think of it — maybe doesn't even need to be developed hegemonically, as it is in the nature of the social (life-world) to overflow whatever nets of signification are being cast to suture the social.

The antagonistic phenomena of the theft of enjoyment in the discourse of Canadian nationalism are symptoms of the Lack of Canada, i.e., the phenomenal "reality" of the antagonistic discourse of Canadian nationalism is symptomatic of a foundational impossibility of suturing the social, of positively constituting Canada. But having just argued that Canada does not exist, I now want to argue that it does exist — in a sense. Canada exists insofar as the symptoms of its Lack have a particularity, i.e., Canada doesn't exist, but the symptoms of its Lack do. It is the particularity of the symptoms of its lack that constitutes what is Canadian. To rephrase this in terms of a question one might ask — what is it that is Canadian about the non-existence of Canada? To be sure we cannot give a full answer to this question, we cannot hope either to net the symbolic order of Canada, not to distill an essential core, but clearly we still want to talk about "Canada" as opposed to any other — equally imaginary — national community.

If Canada doesn't exist, and a Canadian subject doesn't exist, then what does exist? A Lacanian answer would be that symptoms of Canada are all that exist. In Lacanian terms the symptom is what "is" instead of there being nothing. The symptom formation which organizes phenomenal reality thus giving coherence to enjoyment is all-that-there-is. And according to Lacan we must conceive of symptom as *sinthome*, that is, a signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment, a bearer of *jouis-sense*, enjoyment-in-sense. Žižek says of the Lacanian symptom:

What we must bear in mind here is the radical ontological status of symptom: symptom conceived as *sinthome* is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we, the subjects 'avoid madness', the way we choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe) through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures us a certain minimum consistency to our being-in-the-world. If the symptom in the radical dimension is unbound, it means literally 'the end of the world' — the only alternative to the symptom is nothing: pure autism, a psychic suicide, surrender to the death drive even to the total destruction of the symbolic universe. That is why the final Lacanian definition of the end of the psychoanalytic process is "identification with the symptom". The analysis achieves its end when the patient is able to recognize, in the Real of his symptom, the only support of his being. (Žižek '89 75)

The symptom is 'all-that-there-is,' Lacan says. The symptom masks the void, and simultaneously, by its inevitable failure, it declares, or betrays the void. Nationalism introduces the

fantasy of the Nation to fill out the void, but the elusiveness of the Nation, and the antagonism arising from the exclusionary practices which attempt to constitute it, betray its fantastic character. The subject must "go through the fantasy" and face the Real, i.e., confront the radical nothingness behind the symptom formation, come to terms with the fact that the Nation doesn't and cannot exist. Finally, Lacan says, the subject must come to "Love thy symptom as thyself." To "love thy symptom..." is all that one can do, because the symptom is all-that-there-is. By loving the symptom Lacan means something like orienting oneself to the social in a committed, involved, spirited way, taking responsibility for the precariousness and contingency of the symptom and guarding against projects which seek to do violence to the social by attempting to force a closure, attempting to achieve a totalized suturing.

Social solidarity, Canadian nationalism in this instance, derives from common identification with particular symptom formations which mask the Lack underpinning the social. Thus identification is with the symptoms by/through which Enjoyment is organized. Collective identifications are permeated with "*jouis-sense*," enjoyment in sense, and so we must think of our collective identity as achieved and sustained by hegemonic practices which quilt, or bind our subjective enjoyment with symptom formations. These symptom formations are hegemonic discursive constructions of "our," "shared" enjoyment of such ephemeral sensory phenomena as "the taste of our food," "the freshness of our air," "the rhythm of our music," "the joy of our laughter," "the sound of our voices," "the look of each other," "the play and sense of our conversations," "the silence of our forest parks," "the nuances of our wit," "the flavour of our beer," "the sharpness of our prairie light," "the call of the loon," "the chill of our winters," "our awesome wilderness," "our mannerisms and idiom," "the warmth of our hospitality," and so on. Articulatory and hegemonic practices which link the subject to discursively organized complexes of phenomenal sensuousness is essential to identification in general. We must, quite literally, "feel" that we belong.

Hegemonic projects which seek to organize our sensory enjoyment find clearest expression in such things as coffee table "photo journey" books like *A Day in the Life of Canada* photo journeys, *The Real Canada*, etc. These try to organize a sense (literally) of the country. They both succeed and fail to do this. They succeed in capturing for us a "sense" of the country, insofar as there is something in the photographs more than themselves — the object *petit a*, the little piece of the Real — the vital enjoyment that the photograph gives us a glimpse of. Yet by the same measure somehow they necessarily always fail. There is always something that the photographic projects miss, fail to capture, and that too is the little piece of the Real which overflows the organization of the symbolic.

To get a take on the particularity of Canada then, one needs to get at Canadian symptoms as *sinthome*. One needs to look at and think about the discursive construction of Canadian food, Canadian sex, Canadian play, Canadian recreation. Canada exists only as symptoms that organize collective enjoyment, and enjoyment exists only in its excess, in

the re-creation of surplus enjoyment. The sites where Canada is reproduced then are rec rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, pubs, clubs, restaurants and speakeasies, hockey rinks, baseball diamonds, streets and schoolyards, and so on, the sites of the everyday lives of the diverse people who are Canada, who reproduce Canada in their Enjoyment of Canada.

The problem with Canada is, we are told, that we do not have such national symptoms by which our collective enjoyment is/can be organized. There is a dearth of hegemonic projects which bind enjoyment for the collective. We cannot remember why or how we are Canadian; we cannot "feel" Canadian. We have regional identifications, ethnic identifications, class identifications, generational identifications, and so on, but nothing that collects our Enjoyment. Instead as I have shown, we accuse one another of stealing the enjoyment, and that the politics of the ongoing national identity crisis hinge upon the generation of a symptom: the hegemonic deployment of some means of articulating our collective enjoyment.

In what follows I will argue that there is a knot of articulations and associated values central to the symbolic order of Canada. The first of these is the equivalential articulation of enjoyment and endurance. This articulation of enjoyment and endurance has been the basis of the value of tolerance. Second, there is an equivalential articulation of endurance and lack of particularity, which is the basis of the value of unpretentiousness. In combination, at the heart of the symbolic order of Canada is an enjoyment of the endurance of the lack of particularity, associated with values of tolerance and unpretentiousness.

It is not at all difficult to locate equivalential articulations of enjoyment and endurance as a recurring feature in symptoms of Canada. Take for example the centrality in the historical imaginary of heroic epics of endurance: the Franklin voyage, the Yukon gold rush, settling the prairies, and so on. Interestingly, the articulation of enjoyment/endurance is frequently made in terms of a failure. This has a continuity from Franklin's quest for the Northwest Passage to Terry Fox's 'marathon of hope.' Throughout Canadian popular culture there are discourses which celebrate an enjoyment of endurance and a valuation of tolerance. Take for example, our shared enjoyment of enduring Canadian winter. What do we mean by the casual greeting "Cold enough for you, eh?" It asks if you are enjoying the cold? Can you endure the cold? How much cold can you tolerate? The friendliness of the remark depends on the interlocutors sharing the value of tolerance, of presuming the equivalence enjoyment/endurance. What about endurance recreation — skating, cross-country skiing, canoeing, camping, trekking. The heroic endurance/enjoyment of the voyageurs is recreated in the contemporary practice of endurance driving: the person who delights in telling you how they left Brandon at 4 a.m., had a coffee in Thunder Bay, down to Toronto, onto Montreal, had to be back in Sudbury the following night, "got an hours sleep, eh," before leaving for Calgary.

The articulation of enjoyment and endurance is evident in the practice of Canadian domestic architecture and design. The Canadian rec room is a marvelous site of the enjoyment of endurance. The rec room is where the endurance of winter is made enjoyable. Rec rooms have one or two very large

refrigerators chuck full of goodies — lots of beef and steak, some frozen pies. There is a well stocked bar, a couple of bottles of distinctive ethnic origin for a taste of 'the old country,' a bottle of Mescal with a worm in it that somebody brought back from Cancun. Usually there is a collection of some arbitrary thing or other — baseball caps, crests of golf clubs, miniature ethnic figurines, dinky little glasses — adorning the bar. There is a t.v., v.c.r. and a stereo in the corner; a recliner and a large couch. Should you wish to build a rec room, George Dalglish of Winnipeg gives you many helpful hints in his booklet, *Building a rec room*. George says:

Your rec room should be constructed so that the family can really "live" in it. Design it so it can serve a number of purposes. For example, father can entertain business acquaintances, teenagers can do "their thing", mother can entertain her bridge club, or the whole family can get together and spend an evening watching t.v. or play games. And parents, would you not rather have your children enjoying themselves at home rather than at the local "joint"? ...In planning a rec room, decide first on how the WHOLE family can get the most out of it. For example, what hobbies do the family have? Maybe father's hobby is photography and he would like a darkroom... Maybe teenagers like to dance or play pool or ping-pong, so a large enough area could be planned for this. Mother wants a clean and well lighted laundry area where she can do her ironing and sewing in comfort. ...etc.

According to George the rec room really comes into its own during those long cold winter months, and he gives us some good sensible advice on installing a fireplace, and stresses the importance of insulation. How is the rec room valuable? It provides a space in which enjoyment is organized, where we can tolerate the contingency of the social — Father's tiresome friends, the trauma and excess of teenage life, mother's domestic drudgery. The rec room is a tolerant space, where we can enjoy enduring winter, where we party, entertain and amuse ourselves. It is where the symbolic order of the fictional "Canadian family" is recreated: a sort of enjoyable/endurable suburban paunchy patriarchy.

Endurance is wonderfully evident in the enjoyment of Canadian food. The Beaver Club, established in Montreal in 1785, was an exclusive drinking establishment for the trapping and fur trading aristocracy. To be admitted as a member one had to have spent at least one full season in the high country. Each member wore a medal with the motto "Fortitude in Distress." This is an interesting motto. What does it say about the values which the Beaver Club endorses? A member of the Beaver Club values tolerance, tolerance of the distressing contingencies of life in the wilderness. A Beaver Club member enjoys enduring distress. Fortnightly Club meetings consisted of feasts of venison steaks, roasted beaver tails, and pickled buffalo tongues, washed down with gallons of good liquor. Meetings tended to be boisterous, as members enjoyed recreating feats of endurance on their expeditions. A member might for example "shoot the rapids" by riding a wine keg along the table and onto the floor. The Beaver Club is still active, but it's not the only place in which

one can enjoy/endure Canadian food. French Canadian pea soup, cream of fiddlehead soup, smoked fish, Montreal smoked meat, boiled dinner (cabbage, salted cod and potato), bannock, wild rice, poutine (gravy and cheese curd on french fries), roast moose, marinated beaver tails, boiled bears feet, followed by shoo fly pie, maple syrup and Nanaimo bars. I do not have the complete menu, but these were some of the delicacies which guests enjoyed/endured at last year's gala opening of the new Canadian Embassy in Tokyo. At a formal Embassy banquet Canada is identified and represented to both Canadians and Japanese through the enjoyment of the endurance food of the voyageurs, loggers and fur traders.

Canadian cookbooks are full of examples of the equivalential articulation of enjoyment and endurance as quintessentially Canadian. What is also interesting is the way in which the articulation of enjoyment and endurance collects and unifies difference. Canadian cookbooks have sections on "Regional food," "Ethnic food," "Quebec food," etc., all of them finding unity under such categories as "Frontier food," "Practical food," "Cabin food," etc. In a recent collection, *Canadian Feasts from Land and Sea* menus representing the various provinces include: From Newfoundland: figgy duff and curried squid chow mein. From Nova Scotia: Solomon Grundy and Bavarian strawberry. From New Brunswick: cream of fiddlehead soup and curried shrimp. From Quebec: Quebec baked beans, maple glazed carrots, and Chinese asparagus. From Ontario: corn bread and kabobs. From Manitoba: wild rice and chicken cacciatore. From Alberta: Murray's pepper steak, Sharon's beef stew, and stir fried ginger beef. From B.C.: deer or elk soup, roast caribou Grandma Schultz's moose meat sausages and tandoori chicken. But where is the "Canadian" in Canadian food? What collects this diversity? "Backwoods beef stew," "Survival spaghetti sauce," and a chocolate bar which protects you from hypothermia called "The Canadian cold-buster." The "good" of Canadian food, what makes Canadian food "good food," the value of Canadian food, is its heartiness, its enabling Canadians to tolerate the demands and contingencies of the workaday world.

In the discursive construction of "Canadian food" there is an equivalential articulation of enjoyment and endurance. What is "Canadian" in the enjoyment of food is the "survival" in spaghetti sauce. But isn't there something absurd in this articulation of enjoyment and endurance in Canadian food? Pickled buffalo tongues with wild rice and bannock; is that Canadian? Surely not, because, frankly, Canadians don't eat that kind of stuff. Dishing it up at a state banquet is patently absurd. It perfectly exemplifies a symptom of Canada: a hegemonic attempt to produce something Canadian, which, by its failure, shows the impossibility, the non-existence of Canada. The categorization of Canadian cuisine is impossible; what is Canadian defies being located in food, the food defies being located in Canada. Canadian food is roast beef, chow mein, perogies and lasagna, Big Macs and Kraft dinner. Canadian food is derivative, modern, international and convenient. Roti and cabbage rolls and for that matter boiled bears' feet, are all symptoms of Canada, i.e., symptoms of the non-existence and impossibility of Canada. The same is true of the previous examples. We have already seen that "Canadian" recreational

activities are not really that unique, anyone might enjoy them, or for that matter steal the enjoyment of them, simply by enjoying something different. *Canadian Living* has similar difficulty in locating and specifying "the Canadian home." The magazine depicts "the Quebec farmhouse," "the Victorian manor," "the Acadian country kitchen," "the True North style," but what is it that is "Canadian" about *Canadian Living* always eludes us. The "modern townhouse," the "natural look" bears the stamp of massification. Similarly the basement rec room is a suburban phenomenon that can be found anywhere in the North American midwest. George Dalgleish tells Winnipeg homeowners how to "...transform your basement into a Hawaiian outdoor cafe, an English pub, a Mediterranean villa, or any other theme you choose..." but he cannot tell us what a "Canadian" rec room would be like. The particularity then is not given by the material — that is to say by the "Canadian content" of the examples. It is only the equivalential articulation of enjoyment and endurance that puts a Canadian form on the content.

The second equivalential articulation in the symbolic order of Canada which I wish to identify is that of enjoyment and lack of particularity. This is most evident in Canadian humour. Take for example a recent advertising campaign by Molsons called "Great events in Canadian History": "Great event in Canadian history" #1: "After a night of lousy hands Grant Skinner is dealt 3 aces, draws 2 queens, and cleans up." "Great event" #2: "Against all the odds so-&-so's parents allow him to have the cottage for the labour day weekend." #3: So-&-so and so-&-so throw a party and become legends overnight." These ads cleverly play on a Canadian enjoyment of the Lack of particularity. They openly acknowledge their symptomatic character. That there is nothing behind them, that there are no "Great Events of History." That there is nothing other than that which lends coherence and organization to enjoyment. History is nothing more than the resubjection of enjoyment, and so Canadians must love their symptom as themselves. The ad works to sell beer for Molsons insofar as Molsons successfully articulates itself and its product as a symptom that intervenes between the consumer and the Lack, which Canadians can identify with and love, thereby facilitating the reproduction of consumptive enjoyment.

Bob and Doug McKenzie on SCTV provide another example of this particularity of the enjoyment of the endurance of the lack of particularity. The bare, more or less empty set declares the recognition of the lack of particularity. The "great white north" constitutes the Real, the nothingness that lack of particularity exposes them to. The toques, jackets, mitts and boots are the symptom/sinthome which permit their endurance, which allow them to pursue their enjoyment, the consumption of beers and smokes, eh! and the pursuit of excess enjoyment, more beers and smokes. Samuel Beckett could have written Bob and Doug: absurd, minimalist, existentialist. How can it work as comedy? Only if it assumes an ironic relationship to the Lack underpinning "Canadian society." Only if it assumes that we can enjoy the Lack, that we can value the particularity of the lack of particularity.

Recall again the Molsons' commercials: "In Canada, on Saturday nights (at the weekend, in winter...) young people

indulge in a unique ritual, etc." We know that it's not "unique," that the practice is arbitrary. We are ironic about our "uniqueness." What these mundane examples reveal is a crucial aspect of the symbolic order of Canada. What is being endured and enjoyed in the recurring themes of endurance in symptoms of Canada is the particularity of the Lack of particularity. At the heart of the symbolic order of Canada is an ironic relationship to the Lack. Canadians can be goofy about the Lack. We know that we Lack particularity, and that acknowledgement of the Lack is our particularity. We can enjoy the endurance of our Lack of particularity. The sustaining value of national identity is enduring the Lack, and the moral commitment required of Canadians is to not pretend to particularity. The moral commitment which sustains Canadian solidarity is a commitment to not being pretentious. A commitment to not pretending to be something that we are not, a commitment to not pretending that we are "positively," "essentially" Canadian. While others may pretentiously posture as "all American," "true Brit" or whatever, a real Canadian would never pull such a pretentious absurdity. Durkheim says that every society has a version of an ideal type member. "This ideal type which each society demands that its members realize is the keystone of the whole social system and gives it its unity" (DMF 57). The ideal type member of Canadian society is the tolerant unpretentious person, who calmly pursues their business without any fanfare, and is respectful of others who do likewise. Wayne Gretzky then is the perfect national hero, enjoying to perfection the activity demanding the most endurance, displaying a distinctive tolerance in a sport marked by tests of tolerance. Distinct, unmistakably world class, but not in the least bit pretentious about it. In *Canadian Feasts from Land and Sea* there is a "celebrity's favourite menus" section. The "Great One," in true Canadian form, offers us an unpretentious, hearty, multicultural menu, that can tolerate the contingency of all sorts of people turning up for a Canadian dinner party — "chili à la Wayne." Wayne says:

This delicious recipe is perfect for impromptu gatherings. No measuring is required. It depends on how many people and what your tastes are. You need: ground beef. Can(s) of: tomato paste, brown beans, kidney beans, tomatoes. Carrots, broccoli and cauliflower. Tobasco sauce, Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper. Then: brown the ground beef, add the other ingredients, and stir. Cover and simmer for one hour, and remember, the longer it cooks, the thicker and richer it gets.

On a recent national unity caravan Mulroney tried to play on this value of Canadian unpretentiousness. Speaking to a meeting in Alberta Mulroney said:

What Canada is became pretty clear to me during the rescue in Alert.... They brought it off in a typically Canadian way — without fanfare, without much ado, quietly and with competence. ...In that high Arctic adventure there were French-speaking Canadians and English speaking Canadians, neither asking the other where they were from or what language they spoke. ...Up there, on the tundra in

the wind and cold and the terror of encroaching death they were all Canadians.

Pretentious posturing is dispelled by close encounters of the Real kind, Mulroney implies. And he may be correct. In the face of the Real it becomes clear that a morality of compromise and cooperation based on mutual respect is all that there is.

At the heart of the symbolic order of Canada is a knot where endurance and enjoyment, and enjoyment of endurance of lack of particularity are articulated. This knot of meaning supports values of tolerance and unpretentiousness. What the Mulroney example shows however is that precisely because these values depend upon contingent articulations, they are open to a wide range of articulatory and hegemonic projects. Liberal, as per Mulroney's effort, neo-conservative projects which would say that we have endured enough, that our enjoyment is infringed upon by the law of diminishing returns, as per the Reform Party. Unfortunately there is no guarantee that the ironic relationship to the Lack, the unpretentiousness endurance on which the value of tolerance depends, is 'safe,' that the value of unpretentiousness will be hegemonically articulated in terms of a liberal tolerance and a respect for difference. There are many different versions of unpretentiousness, some of which are extremely pretentious, pretending to tolerance but masking racism and xenophobia.

The articulation enjoyment of the endurance of the lack of particularity, and the values of tolerance and unpretentiousness all come together in the quintessentially Canadian fashion statement "Tilley Endurables." And here also we will find the pretense of unpretentiousness and tolerance masking xenophobic intolerance and fear of theft of enjoyment. "Tilley Endurables" produces a range of clothing which aims to be "the best travel and adventure clothing in the world." Rugged but stylish, eminently practical, Tilley hats, jackets, shirts and pants can tolerate all the contingencies of an adventurous encounter with difference. The washing instructions say "give 'em hell," "Tilley Endurables can tolerate it. Tilley Endurables are clothes for a Canadian enjoyment. Tilley Endurables advertise the fact that their products are "logo free," no pretentious posing of designer labels here! The manager of the Tilley store at Queens Quay, the most pretentious shopping mall in Toronto, told me, proudly, "we're so middle of the road that nobody notices us." But, oddly, or rather, and of course this is exactly the pretension of unpretentiousness, everybody does. During the Gulf War, Tilley hats were regular issue for Canadian forces. Lt. Commander Hayes of the Royal Canadian Navy tells us that "It's definitely a Canadian hat. You can't get it anywhere else." Being recognized as having a "definitely Canadian hat" was important in Saudi Arabia, lest the Arabs confuse our boys with the Americans, I suppose. And of course, in a Tilley hat one was appropriately dressed for that adventurous encounter with the Other. War is after all, the ultimate adventure travel experience.

Tilley Endurables have another distinguishing feature worthy of note. Tilley Endurables are famous for having "security pockets" and "secret pockets." One of their top of the line products is a jacket with sixteen pockets, only nine of which are visible. Some pockets are so secret in fact, that the customer is not informed of their whereabouts until after they

have purchased the jacket. Why should one need such a jacket? If one is to enjoy/endure/tolerate the adventurous encounter with the Other, while maintaining one's distinctively Canadian Unpretentiousness, one needs a Tilley jacket because the Other might be lightfingered. We can enjoy/endure the encounter with the Other, but we must be careful lest they pick some of our pockets and steal our enjoyment. And where might an unpretentious Canadian encounter the



lightfingered Other? Where else but the field of difference that is Yonge St. in the adventure travel of everyday life. Tilley Endurables express the subtleties of Canadian racism: enjoying, enduring, tolerating the encounter with the Other, but remaining skeptical and retentive, fascinated and fearful of the thieves of enjoyment.

Many Canadians are anxious about their identity because they are too close to the Real, and this anxiety is presently being picked up on by various xenophobic projects. The task of democratic political leadership may be to take them through the fantasy, and face up to the Lack, and then to come to identify with their symptom as themselves. To identify with the Lack in the big Other and to make a commitment to unpretentiousness, a commitment that would demand that the openness be kept open, protected from xenophobic nationalist hegemonic and articulatory practices that would seek to close it.

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On the Brink

by Geoff Pevere

Drawn there by design, desire or both, the subjects of English Canadian movies often find themselves peering over the brink. Usually, as in Bruce McDonald's *Highway 61*, the brink is figurative. It's experience at the point of revelation, from which the person drawn there cannot possibly turn away unaffected, unchanged or, often in Canadian films, undefeated. Rarely is the brink literal, and perhaps never so literal as in Kevin McMahon's documentary *The Falls*. But even in this film, which is a stately, troubling essay on the noxious undercurrents of the Honeymoon Capital, the brink cannot help but resonate far beyond the verdant golf courses of Queenston Heights. Like McDonald's and so many other English Canadian features made in the past thirty years, *The Falls* is the product of a sensibility determined to address its own uncertain and seemingly unequal relationship with the world, to plumb the consequences of feeling a tourist in one's own neighbourhood.

Yet while these films fit perfectly within what certainly ranks as the dominant (if quite likely unconscious) project of the English Canadian feature, they also represent what may be significant variations upon the theme. Drawn — like so many rootless Canadian souls before them — to the brink, they respond in strikingly different ways, and in ways which mark breaks with the legion of dour or bedazzled edge-dwellers who preceded them. Indeed, they may represent noteworthy junctures in the development of their respective generic genealogies. Apart from offering new vantage points of



the brink and those who go there, that is, they offer reflexive views of their own ancestry. Thus, as fiction feature and documentary respectively (and utterly contemporary ones at that), McDonald's and McMahon's films incite reflection not merely on the conspicuous Canadian interest in staring down our own sense of awe and dread, they probe the forms and conventions we've designed to take us there.

Highway 61, for example, must rank as among the most self-consciously "Canadian" of fiction features this country has yet produced. The account of a sexually-repressed, trumpet-doodling barber's physical and metaphysical journey into the dark heart of America (which proves far less dark than it initially seems), the film often seems a veritable checklist of signature English Canadian concerns and clichés: the road itself is of course vintage Shebib, the couple-on-the-lam conjures *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, and that coffin on the roof, with its constant reminder of both mortal and moral decay, evokes the most resonant images from Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine*.¹

Other evocations, while less literal or specific, are nevertheless equally redolent of the English Canadian cinema's predominant and impressively durable themes and interests: the protagonist defined by disappointment and disaffection; the United States as North America's id — a place of mystery, danger and seduction;² the fundamental rootlessness of the Canadian experience, and the attendant struggle to situate the parameters of self and place.

Yet while the tone of the film is clearly comic, it is neither patronizing nor parodic. While clearly respectful of its influences, it isn't dependent on them: in the late winter of 1992, when *Highway 61* had one of the most successful commercial openings in the history of independently produced English Canadian movies, you can bet it wasn't the resonant echoes of Shebib or Jutra that were packing people in. Canadian film history remains an unknown and irrelevant entity to all but select groups of Canadians, the sum total of whom still couldn't account for *61*'s impressively un-Canadian showing at the box office. While amply evident to those up on the history, the film's Canadian-movie references are muted, textual affairs, and clearly not crucial to one's comprehension or appreciation of the experience as a whole.

But they are there and, apparent or not, they are central to at least one of *Highway 61*'s more provocative crusades. Simultaneously, the film both asserts and strives to redefine the form and the function of the "traditional" English Canadian feature film. While its final effort may prove unsuccessful, the attempt itself merits note.

While much of *Highway 61* resonates with clear echoes of English Canada's cinematic past, its ultimate purpose seems less to follow a tradition than reroute it. The first hints of this are a matter of tone. While not, as already noted, disdainful of its ancestry, *Highway 61* is certainly ironic. The film gets significant mileage out of its self-conscious "Canadianness" (like the hoser who sells his soul for beer, or the malevolent American customs thugs), and Pokey Jones, our hero, is clearly an ironic variation upon the legion of all-Canadian cinematic losers that have slouched before him.

But while McDonald seems determined to build his story

on a foundation of apparent tradition, he may come less to honour English Canadian cinema than to rehabilitate it. While most of Pokey's genealogical predecessors shared the barber's profound sense of confusion, helplessness and disaffection, they were rarely permitted the sense of final triumph Pokey enjoys. Effectively crowd-pleasing as it seems to be, the sum total of McDonald's attempts to render his protagonist's sense of inadequacy immaterial, and his sense of imminent danger false — the film's Satanic soulcatcher turns out to be bogus, and Pokey's gun-wielding, drug-running companion, played by Valerie Buhagiar, undergoes a form of born-again, moral baptism at the end — may serve to deny what may be the most potent Canadian film tradition of them all. In offering Pokey as a lost Canadian soul who finds his way, McDonald has certainly erected an audience-friendly variation upon the customary theme of irredeemable Canadian fatalism (a theme still being richly addressed by such filmmakers as Atom Egoyan, William D. MacGillivray, Darryl Wasyk and Guy Maddin), but it may ultimately amount to a happy face slapped on a death's head.

Not merely a question of mood or attitude (not, that is, somebody scolded into submission), the impressively hale and resolute tendency of English Canadian film to limn the parameters of hope and possibility may be as deeply entrenched as it is distinct. If the central problem facing the development of a visible and vital English Canadian film tradition (apart, that is, from the staggeringly unequal conditions of American-dominated distribution and exhibition patterns) has been the task of distinguishing itself from the oppressive and ubiquitous fact of Hollywood, alienation is much more than a matter of disposition: it's an act of self-assertion. Marginalized in their own country, doomed to compete with an entertainment industry whose most effective agent of domination is a constantly recycled appeal not to worry, the stubbornly worrisome nature of much English Canadian cinema must be interpreted as both an act of resistance and an assertion of identity. Grim that is, but perfectly healthy. But putting a smile on things, McDonald may be making an effective appeal to audiences probably unaccustomed to, or uncomfortable with, the Canadian cinema's customary explorations of gloom and loss;³ but he may be mistaking a change of hat for a change of heart. He may pull Pokey away from the brink and point him in a sunnier direction, but he certainly hasn't made that big hole go away. It looms behind, vast and empty, unimpressed by the accoutrements of good cheer.

Situating itself at the lip of one of the country's (if not the world's) most renowned brinks, Kevin McMahon's *The Falls* works in precisely the opposite direction. Opening with the expected images of sunshine, spray and tourists' good cheer, the film begins a slow, determined descent: from sunshine to darkness, cheer to decay, from workaday commercial bustle to toxic stagnation. Penetrating the surface of appearances (and McMahon's film, which almost instantly notes that "it's all in the framing," is about nothing if not the ideologically-loaded act of looking itself), the film acts as a form of intellectual excavation, peeling away layer upon layer of cultural and



The Falls by Kevin McMahon

historical sediment. Seeing in Niagara — itself one of the most-photographed sites on the planet — a paradigm for Western culture's increasingly suicidal relationship with nature, *The Falls* moves, with a disarming, almost processionary grace, inexorably from the trifling to the apocalyptic. By making plain the connections between such otherwise purely postmodern Niagara phenomena as motels, gift shops and gore-soaked wax museums, McMahon's film tracks the spectacular debasement of the falls, the former splendour of which now hosts one of the continent's most fecund toxic waste sites, back to the root ideology of European imperialism. From the assumption that the world is yours for the taking, the leap to nature as commodity isn't merely simple, it's inevitable. And few square miles of "Nature" have been quite so ruthlessly commodified as Niagara. Starting with those grinning tourists at the brink, *The Falls* plunges over, headlong into the strata of chemical and historical pollution those smiles on the surface strive to deny. It's Pokey Jones' journey in reverse and, not surprisingly, it comes to rest in a far darker place. Darker, and perhaps much closer to home.

1. Of no small significance, particularly when considering *Highway 61*'s impressive run at the box office, is the fact that it's a movie steeped as much in American as Canadian cultural references. More so, in fact: Don McKellar's perplexed, self-deprecating performance as Pokey Jones owes much to Woody Allen, and the plot itself (nerd and bombshell on the lam), is *Something Wild* revisited. The title, evoking both Dylan and the American heartland, taps into the very heart of rock and roll history. Comparatively, the Canadian references, as befits Canadian references, are much more discreet.

2. Valerie Buhagiar's heroine, a pistol-packing American outlaw figure, also fits soundly within a tradition of American characters in Canadian films. Just as the American landscape itself connotes exoticism and danger in *Highway 61*, so have many Canadian films regarded American characters as seductive, mysterious, dangerous and irresistible. Some cases in point: Don Shebib's *Between Friends*, Sandy Wilson's *My American Cousin*, David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, and Philip Borsos' *The Grey Fox*.

3. A few months before *Highway 61* opened to such commercial and critical enthusiasm, Atom Egoyan's *The Adjuster*, despite its prestige status as a veteran of the Cannes and New York festivals, opened to much more muted response. Resolute in its deadpan fatalism, the lukewarm commercial performance of *The Adjuster* proved at least one thing: when it comes to probing issues of disaffection and existential dread, not even that famous Canadian capacity for taking other people's word for it can lure fellow Canucks away from *The Last Boy Scout*. Big as it was in New York, it must still have struck many potential ticket buyers as an artfully-rendered downer.

by Cameron Bailey

What the story is

AN INTERVIEW WITH SRINIVAS KRISHNA



"...cinema itself is political. The very construction of cinema is political. And most cultural theorists don't know fuck all about cinema. They rely much too much on content instead of looking at how the story is told, and what that has to do with content, and with the politicization of content. So that enterprise is really at the expense of the filmmaker, because it silences the filmmaker."

Srinivas Krishna's debut feature *Masala*, leads what might be called the second generation of Canadian subaltern cinema. A raging hybrid of styles and concerns, it marks a departure from the predominant form employed to represent people of colour in Canada. What I've previously called the "cinema of duty" — social issue in content, documentary-realist in style, firmly *responsible* in intention — positions its subjects in direct relation to social crisis, and attempts to articulate "problems" and "solutions to problems" within a framework of centre and margin, white and non-white communities. The goal is often to tell buried or forgotten stories, to write unwritten histories, to "correct" the misrepresentations of the mainstream.

Masala is Canada's first feature film to work fully outside of that model. Rooted in the diversity *within* Toronto's Indian community — conflicts across generation, class and personality — the film also engages with a diversity of representations. Using the conventions of disaffected youth dramas, Hollywood musicals, Hindi musicals, European art cinema, and Canadian satire, *Masala* moves beyond the cinema of duty by decentering the whole notion of centre-margin as a driving force in the film, and by making representation itself a concern. The heterogeneity of narrative styles in the film uproots its subjects from the fixed, inevitable narrative of crisis, and opens a space for the representation of characters





whose experience is similarly heterogenous.

By positioning *Masala* as the first of what I imagine will be a new group of films, I in no way want to suggest any kind of linear development from the cinema of duty to a new cinema of productive hybridity. Both sorts of films will no doubt continue to be made; in fact, I expect that these two broad categories will take their place in a fluid continuum of responses to the uprootedness, hybridity, and various systems of racism that mark our Canadian experience. The story, in effect, is just beginning.

Masala's plot is dense, but necessary to the discussion that follows. A sullen ex-con named Krishna (played by Krishna himself) gets out of jail and fails miserably at rejoining his extended family. His parents and siblings were killed five years earlier on a plane that exploded in mid-flight — the disaster still haunts Krishna — and his uncle Lallu Bhai Solanki (Saeed Jaffrey) heads a family of scheming social climbers who have no time for the grubby, maladjusted youth. Lallu Bhai is busy on other fronts, trying to arrange a marriage for his onanistic son, and striking a deal with a group of Sikhs who want to use his sari shop as a depot for smuggling revolutionary toilet paper back to India.

Meanwhile, Lallu Bhai's cousin, Mr. Tikkoo (also Saeed Jaffrey) goes from timid postman to potential millionaire when a priceless stamp falls into his hands. It's been blown there by the blue-skinned god Lord Krishna (Jaffrey again), acting on behalf of Grandma Tikkoo (Zohra Segal). Mr. Tikkoo's new possession brings in the Canadian government, Lallu Bhai's scheming attracts the mounties, and Krishna's alienation ends in sudden death. The film ends without full and fair redemption and punishment, but with the establishment of a new museum of philately, opened by the minister of multiculturalism.

At this writing *Masala* has grossed over \$70,000 domestically, making it an outstanding success among English Canadian films. That success was anything but assured. Hampered by over cautious distribution, lack of access to first-run theatres, and strong opposition from Toronto's Indian communities, the film found its audience slowly and almost by chance. It's no surprise. Systemic ignorance, hesitation and misrecognition are part of the context in which people of colour make films in Canada. That *Masala* exists at all is a tribute to the will of its director (along with co-producer Camelia Frieberg), and the beneficence, ill-thought out or not, of government funders. That the film exists as it does, in its rich and richly problematic state, is a tribute to those same forces.

This interview with Srinivas Krishna took place in Toronto on January 31, 1992, just before the commercial release of *Masala*, on February 7.

Cineaction: From a lot of different angles — including how it looks — *Masala* is a departure from most Canadian independent filmmaking. What were you aiming for in the visual style of the film?

Srinivas Krishna: In this kind of independent cinema you're expected to make a quiet film, low budget, modest. People wonder why the long take is so common in independent cinema, why it's got this whole discourse around it. 'Oh, if you cut too much you're just doing TV or something.' The reason is you don't have the time to do the setups that you want to do. That's what I was after from the beginning. This story has so many characters and a multiplicity of points of view, and I wanted it to be a certain kind of film that presented the simultaneity of different characters' viewpoints. That just meant a certain kind of shooting that was very hard to manage in production.

At one point I just took my whole storyboard and threw it out the car window on the way home. It was just useless. There was no time to do it. If you want to go after a certain kind of formalism you really need time to do it.

But actually I'm much happier with what I ended up with. There are directors that just walk with their nose to the ground, who just see one thing ahead in the distance and walk straight towards it. The truth about throwing the storyboard out the window is suddenly it opened up, it just created an occasion for other ideas I would never have thought of to pop in. It becomes much more intuitive in one way, but then I found that everyone was keying in to the same intuition. It left room for accidents to happen that were really important accidents. I'm happy with it ultimately. I don't know if we could really have gone any other way.

Cineaction: Could you talk about the way you use sex in the film, in the sex scenes and elsewhere, because it seems to me unusual, certainly for a Canadian film.

Krishna: First tell me why you think it's unusual.

Cineaction: Well the sex scenes are very graphic, but more than that there's a guilt-free, uncompromised attitude —

Krishna: Sex was a metaphor when I was writing. There's the character of the med student who masturbates. The guy is a total onanist, he's just concerned with himself, and the aggrandizing of pleasure for himself.

His sex scene is his fantasy, and in his fantasy, he is the one who's the pleasuring, desiring subject. It's very much about his own pleasure. What I wanted in the real love scenes as opposed to the fantasy love scenes was the opposite of that. I wanted sex there to be about mutual pleasure. I don't know if I really did get that, though, because the actress wouldn't take off her clothes. I couldn't shoot what I wanted to shoot, so I had to turn it into some kind of comic farce.

You have the commercial Indian movies where sex is titillating, and it's put against a backdrop that you can't talk about sex, so you have to get at sex through really degrading ways. And then in the Indian art cinema sex becomes something that's really not dealt with at all. Sex is erased from the picture. What I did want to do in the film was show these people as sexualized characters. It was part and parcel of everything else that forms their personalities. I wanted to just have it *there*. There was no particular agenda with it, I just wanted it there. But I don't know why that's groundbreaking.

Cineaction: Well, only because in most Canadian cinema sex isn't depicted in as frank a way, and recently is implicated in all sorts of frustrated and odd desires.

Krishna: Canadians don't have sex, that's why.

Cineaction: Or they don't like having sex.

Krishna: They don't like having sex. And for Americans sex is violence.

Cineaction: At one point one of the women in *Masala* calls Indian men mother-loving, women-hating, and limp-dicked. Where does that come from?

Krishna: I've heard it. Not the entire speech, but pieces. It's something that's there, and that voice needed to be heard. Indian men can be extremely irritating.

The thing about power is you have a voice at the expense of someone else. And in the Indian milieu, and I don't think it's that different from any other milieu, you have men who have and hold power, and do it at the expense of other voices.

Cineaction: I know the film has been controversial within Indian communities. What are some of the things that different Indian audiences haven't liked?

Krishna: I didn't really have a screening with a lot of Indians until the Vancouver Film Festival. There was a 600-seat theatre, about 400 were Indians, and it was really a riotous screening, people were really having a good time. I was looking forward to the question-and-answer. Everyone stayed after the film. I got up with Saeed [Jaffrey] and [producer] Camelia [Friebert], and this quite elderly man got up at the back and said, 'Your film is very full of nice insights about life and all, but why did you have to make it *this* way? I can't show this to my family.' Then this woman beside him got up and said 'I just want to say one thing. Indian women do not marry for homes and Indian men do not marry for fucks. And I don't appreciate all this bad language.' And then the screaming started. Four hundred people screaming at each other. I was holding a microphone and screaming and you couldn't even hear me.

The funniest thing was on the way out younger Indians came up to me and apologized for those comments, saying 'Don't listen to them, we're really glad you made this film.' All I could say was you should have said something. There's no point telling me after I'm nailed against the wall. You should have said something then. That kind of disturbed me.

You get into a really difficult position that I'm not happy being in. This film becomes something of a film that all Indians invest their expectations in, because it's one of the first ones made here. So I have to be some kind of representative, which is unfair. I understand why it's expected, but it's a really difficult position to negotiate. I didn't make it to please Indians, and I didn't make it to displease Indians either. I made it so, as far as Indians go, some kind of debate might come out of it, and some kind of continuing argument. It's not a definitive statement. But people, you know, they want to be represented, in the most idyllic ways, and no one in the world is like that.

Cineaction: To what degree did you want to, if not displease, then at least shake up Indian audiences?

Krishna: I didn't make the film for Indians. I was really aware of that when I was writing it. I was aware of Indians, particularly Indians living outside of India, but the film doesn't

direct itself right at them. There are asides made to Indians, but it doesn't address itself directly to them.

Cineaction: Who did you make the film for?

Krishna: That's a difficult question, I've been thinking about that now. I don't know. I made it for certain ideas I had, and that may be the most honest way of saying it. And I hope it reaches some kind of audience, but it's really hard when you make a film like this to really know who that audience is, because it's so hard to find, and it might not already exist. So in a way I invent the audience for this film with it.

If you're making a genre picture you know who the audience is, but not if you're making this kind of picture, which is not white, which is made by someone from India, here, and which recognizes being here. You're recognized being here if you serve tea, if you're a waiter, or if you drive a cab or if you're a doctor or whatever, but your story is not recognized, and the telling of the story is not recognized either. It doesn't exist, it hasn't existed. So in a sense I was wondering who the audience is but I didn't know.

Cineaction: There's a tradition in Indian culture of making fun of Sikhs as bumbler — in a way they're Indian's Newfoundlanders. Do you feel your film stereotypes Sikhs?

Krishna: Everyone in the film is bumbling. I didn't want to privilege them above anyone else. So there's a kind of evenness of perspective regarding the achievement of everyone. I don't think they're necessarily stereotyped at all, but what I was trying to do with that was...it's really complicated, and at times I feel like I have my back up against the wall. But let me try to put it to you, and it's going to be kind of a convoluted answer.

The whole film deals with stereotypes, and those stereotypes are the way we would like to stereotype ourselves, the way others stereotype, and the way we can assume stereotypes to manoeuvre in society. I was asked, why did the Sikh character have to be a terrorist? Well, he's not a terrorist. That's precisely the thing. But the minute I make any suggestion of it, the minute any other character in the film thinks that he is we're all ready to believe it. Indeed, he's the nicest character in the film, and probably the smartest. When it finally comes out that he's not a terrorist, some people refuse to believe that he isn't. And others say I'm mistreating Sikhs, but I don't think I'm doing anything of the kind. Part of what the film does is imply the complicity of the viewer in stereotyping. This is something I get all the time with the med student's sexual fantasy, that I'm just degrading women, I'm a misogynist. I'm just trying to ride that notion of who is the desiring subject, and who has the orientalist gaze here.

[The med student's fantasy] is like Playboy goes to India, that's how it's presented, even to the extent where she's like the classic yogi contortionist who can put her feet behind her ears. The fact is that people enjoy that kind of scene. But everyone neglects the fact that it's not my fantasy, it's the fantasy of the character. That's why I thought I might implicate the audience in its enjoyment of the scene. By making it his fantasy they might sense their own complicity in enjoying it the way he enjoyed it. But that sort of self-referential take on stereotypes seems to be lost on people. For something to be self-referential, maybe it needs to be part of people's awareness, and maybe it's not. Maybe it doesn't circulate in peo-



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ple's consciousness at all, maybe they don't care.

These are stock characters in the way you would find stock characters in Restoration comedies. But every stock character here has some kind of slippage. What I'm trying to do is say that things aren't what they appear to be, people aren't the stereotypes they appear to be, and the strongest indication of that is the Sikh himself.

This is a film about home. The Air India plane six years ago had exploded over the Atlantic, I knew people on that plane. I want to say that this was really a momentous, horrible event in the history of Indians who live outside of India. I don't know how much it really meant to Indians who live in India, but to Indians who live outside of India it was a turning point, or crossing a point of no return. And you see it cropping up in so many places, from Salman Rushdie to my film, and I understand they're actually making another film about that particular incident in Vancouver. And Bharati Mukherjee wrote a short story about it. What it

began to mean to me was that there is no going home. Here are these people going home, some of them returning permanently, and the plane blows up. And for all the suspicions, we still don't really know why it happened. There is this, what I now consider to be nothing better than a rumour that it was Sikh separatists or terrorists that did it, but it hasn't been really proved. So we still subsist with this rumour.

So I thought, there really is no going home. And you realize it's not the home that you left. And you, having left, are not the same person. So the home that you thought was home only exists in memory.

So what happens when you don't have a home. The Sikh character, and all the characters are in the process of claiming a home, or rejecting a home. So the Sikh character *did* have to be a Khalistani, for him to make sense. This is a guy who lives outside the place that he considers home. Except that that place is yet to exist. It's a Khalistan that doesn't exist, it's a



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mythical home that he's trying to bring into reality. So that's why he's not just an ordinary taxi driver. He's also a Khalistani. But that doesn't mean he's a terrorist. He's using language. I think what Sikhs get upset about is that line, 'It's the history of the Sikh people, it's the history of oppression. Everyone has time to read on the loo.' The understanding of my intention is that 'well, that's all our history is worth.' I never even thought of it that way. But having heard it I understand how it's construed. But that's not my intention. The intention is in the context of 'Is he carrying guns? No, he's carrying toilet paper.' And that has to do with the fact that toilet paper has to do with class in India. Most people do not use toilet paper. It's a very Western thing. It's not something that's part of your home. It's something that's imported to elevate you out of your Third Worldness. So, certainly, that's what I would have done. I would have sent toilet paper back, because you immediately lure people with the seduc-

tiveness of the first world, and at the same time you carry on it this history.

We know the stereotypes. So let's not pretend that we don't know them. And don't expect me to rectify the stereotypes that I haven't created. At least I'm talking about them, deflating them, turning them around.

Look, I'm really pissed off, actually. I'm fucking pissed off. When I went to [the] Sundance [Festival in Park City, Utah], I had people I won't say who, but they're Americans, calling the film misogynist, homophobic, heterophobic, and racist. Racist against who? Against Indians, of course. The most irritating thing was, who are these people who are calling me racist? They're white, for one thing. They're all overeducated by third-rate semioticians, and they all wear black clothing. So I called them Black Robes. I'm convinced it's a missionary hangover. I don't know about you but I hate that movie *Black Robe*, but I'm glad it was made because it gave me this word

to call these people. They're just proselytizing pigs. I just don't know why people talk about cinema that way.

Cineaction: What kind of defense do you have in that situation?

Krishna: You have no defense. My only defense is to call these people racists, which is not the kind of defense I would want, but it's the same fallacy. Or to equate them to missionaries. Here come the old colonizers again. But that's only to show that there's nothing I can really say to their accusation, because it's not the point. Why don't they say those things about *Terminator 2*?

Cineaction: In the press kit for *Masala* you say that "My experience is too fragmented and somehow too inclusive to be contained in a genre." What do you mean by that?

Krishna: Again it'll be a complicated answer. I started out writing what I thought would be a very simple genre picture, some kind of *Rebel Without a Cause*, alienated youth thing. I had one commitment, which was I wanted to set it within a circle that I was very familiar with. At the time I was working in New York, and I was making stories that I realized did not really reflect my personal experience. So that's what I wanted to do.

But those were ultimately contradictory desires, wanting to do a genre film, but wanting the genre to reflect personal experience, which has to do with Indians here. That became clear to me with the sudden desire to put Lord Krishna in the movie. It started to break apart the whole thing. I thought, is this an Indian mythological picture? No. I decided that this was a picture set in the Christian world. But what happens when you import a god who is not a part of this world, not even recognized as being a god?

It occurred to me that in Christian literature, or even in post-Christian, modern secularized literature, god does not appear in the story. Why is that? Well, maybe because god is the author of all stories. Culture consists of those stories a group tells itself to explain the world back to itself. And the author of those stories is traditionally god. So in Christian literature, god doesn't appear because he's the author of the author. And the author cannot know his own author's intentions, now can he? So it dawned on me that story is a very powerful idea. And, very aware of the relationships of power within society, it occurred to me that stories are a way of exercising power, that culture is a way of exercising power, usually by one group over another.

And if culture — or history — in a way is the story, the narrative of the world, then someone is telling that story, and it's not god. We all know who it is, and it's not god. Well, I won't even say it, but we all know who it is. So I thought well if this is the metanarrative then all those other narratives underneath it — genre, for example — they all subscribe to that metanarrative of culture, of power. And they just can't reflect an experience that becomes aware of that and won't subscribe to that narrative any more. It's not telling another story, and insisting that my other story is the right story.

It's like this tawdry word multiculturalism. When you bring people from all parts of the world, and put them in one place, and they each have their own culture (which is their own narrative of the world that explains the world to them), then who is the real author?

So what I meant by genre was that the film became a conscious subversion of genre. The film became a story of this, formally, narratively. This is why I made the film, to ask who is the author? Perhaps we don't have an author the minute we recognize that there are all these different stories, and all these different discourses, and they're all quite subjective, and they're all power grabs of one kind or another. So what is the legitimate story? And how can we make sense?

When I was making this film three things happened — the Berlin Wall came down, [Salman] Rushdie was incarcerated, and the Gulf War. Those just seemed to be so telling. You can't ignore the world any more. There's no quiet retreat, there's no privileged art space that's outside of the world. And maybe the most important project for art is to try to describe the world we live in, instead of this other narrative, or genre, that does not describe the world. It's an illusion, it's an out and out lie. To think that we can tell stories that make sense is a lie about the world.

When I see a genre picture I find I don't exist. If I want to exist then I have to obey the rules of the genre. And I'm not going to.

This is what happens. If you come from India and you live here and you live everywhere — I've lived in the States, I've lived in India, I've lived here — then you can't claim any kind of essentialist ground to say I am an Indian, or an American or an Canadian. You can't say this is my education, and it follows in this tradition of the European university, or the Indian university or whatever. You become some kind of fucking colonial hybrid. You become like a weed in the garden. The only comforting thing about that feeling is that it's going to increase, because more and more of the world is becoming like that. That gives me optimism.

Cineaction: Where would you say your work fits among other Indians working outside of India. Do you find connections to Rushdie, or Hanif Kureishi, or —

Krishna: I don't know how it fits, because I don't know that it's such a broad spectrum of things that you can find yourself in it. I don't know that I have any connection with Hanif Kureishi. The concerns aren't the same, or if they are they're presented very differently.

My interests are kind of specific. They have to do with narrative, and what I just went to lengths and pains to describe to you. People talk about cinema as a formal event. But I can't quite dissociate those formal concerns from narrative concerns, because I tend to see stories as a political event, so the cinema becomes a political event. The act of making cinema becomes a political event. And this is inspired by cinema from the 60s.

Since then it's been sublimated into art again. I think, when did Godard stop talking? Well, Godard stopped talking when cultural theorists started using cinema as their arena for talking about culture. I have the biggest quarrel with cultural theorists, to be frank. For them, films are the occasion, the text by which you can read other things. And so it becomes the domain for talking about Marxism, feminism, or any other "ism." I don't know that that really addresses what I want to address, which is that cinema *itself* is political. The very construction of cinema is political. And most cultural theorists don't know fuck all about cinema. They rely much too much



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on content instead of looking at how the story is told, and what that has to do with content, and with the politicization of content. So that enterprise is really at the expense of the filmmaker, because it silences the filmmaker. To treat cinema as a domain to talk about these other things means the filmmaker is a primitive. He has no real voice. He is just a social product, which I, the privileged cultural theorist, can talk about. And...I disagree with that.

One sees oneself as raised primarily in these traditions of the 20th century — surrealism, modernism — I get tired of being called some kind of Hindi cinema freak. So I would say it's more than expatriate Indian work, it's a certain kind of work that is postcolonial, living in the homeland of the old colonial father.

Cineaction: And Canadian filmmakers?

Krishna: I find myself much more aligned with someone like Felix de Rooy or Isaac Julien than with Bruce McDonald or Atom Egoyan. That's not to say their films are bad or good. It's just, how do these films exist as a movement?

Cineaction: In *Masala* your character has an unresolved streak of self-hatred, an extreme discomfort with Indianness as defined by those around him. What were you drawing on?

Krishna: Just experience. Not just mine, but also the experience of Indians who live here. There are certain things that are acceptable and certain things that are unacceptable if you're an Indian, certain things that you keep at home, certain things that you keep outside the home. Eventually that gulf becomes very difficult to bridge, and often you're put in a position where you have to go with one or the other. This is the essentialist argument. The opposing, knee-jerk reaction is to hate it.

And again it comes in trying to take these *Rebel Without a Cause* kind of character and examine his alienation. In this case that's where it comes from. If you have enough racism directed against you, like it was here in the 70s, at some point you find yourself wavering between self-hatred and self-glorification. I think both of those are untenable, and they're both there in various characters in the film.

Cineaction: The easier plot would have had your character 'progress' to the point where he accepts his hybridity and becomes less alienated. You don't do that. The film ends with him in an unresolved position. Why?

Krishna: He goes from self-hatred to a kind of facile acceptance. He's an outsider within a community of outsiders. I couldn't buy him coming to terms with his hybridity and living happily after. And if I wrote that it probably would have been construed as a nice happy

ending anyway. Hybridity is an undefined position. You're always fluctuating. So how can you be happy with it?

Cineaction: People are calling this a postmodern film, and —

Krishna: I hate that word, and I don't think it is. I don't think it's postmodern. A masala is not a pastiche. You combine a bunch of different things to create a taste that doesn't exist in any one of the things. With a pastiche the elements don't amount to anything more —

Cineaction: They don't cohere.

Krishna: They don't cohere. The reason why white artists make postmodernist art is because they really can't make sense of the world. That whole structure of colonialism, and the east-west split, it's crumbling. How can they make sense of it? This is the story they've been trying to subscribe to for 500 years. So things get postmodernist. But when you get people who are ghosts of the past — what's this Indian guy doing here? — when you get ghosts of the past telling stories drawing from different things, it's not the pastiche of postmodernism at all. It becomes a different kind of thing. It becomes a very political language, a political gesture, which postmodernism isn't. Comfortable white people dabbling in the world is not political in the way that Marquez's or Rushdie's writings are.

Cineaction: How did you want the musical numbers to function in the film?

Krishna: I wanted them to express the inner lives of these characters, a very unChristian sense of subjectivity.

The Christian mind has a problem with subjectivity because it believes that the world is noble, either through God or through rationalism, if they're post-Christian. When you acknowledge subjectivity then you undermine people's objective statements about the world. I wanted to express the inner lives of these characters, but I didn't want to do it in familiar ways, like the flashback. I wanted to resort to something else, so I thought the musical was the way.

But it wasn't the Hindi movie musical that inspired it. It was the idea of the musical, that song can serve as a break from the narrative. One thinks, then, that the narrative is the objective reality of the story, and then you have the musical numbers as subjective fantasies. But I wanted to turn what is the subjective and what is the objective. So in the first musical number I wanted it to be a blend of things. There's the Indian, the Hindi musical, the Busby Berkeley musical, the music video. That character can choose to represent herself, to fantasize about herself, in all three ways. There's the Indian goddess, the *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, and some kind of modernist combination, some Amelia Earheart, airplane-flying thing.

Those are the most blatant elements that convey that subjectivity, but it exists in smaller things, like the airplanes. And the projections of the character I play. They're not flashbacks, because he was never on the plane, they're projections of what might have happened. Also Lord Krishna, who turns up on TV, in the sky, and also in Krishna's dream. So, what is subjective space, and what is the objective space of the film? They intersect.

Cineaction: I remember when we first met on the set of *Masala* you were pretty clear in not wanting to be considered a Canadian filmmaker. Where does that unease come from?

Krishna: We all know who controls the stories in Canada, what the story is, and why no one, still, talks about the plane that blew up over the Atlantic, why the ship of Sikhs a hundred years ago is never talked about in history.

Fine, I have a Canadian passport. I've spent a lot of time here. But there is no Canadian cinema with reference to my film. It doesn't exist. Canadian cinema comes out of documentary, the observational way of looking at the world. And it's a big lie. Every way of looking at the world is a vested way. So I don't really find a tradition of Canadian cinema to come out of.

Cineaction: And yet *Masala* speaks quite directly about and to Canada, in terms of parodying things like the Mounties, multiculturalism, hockey.

Krishna: Mainstream is represented by the icons of mainstream Canada, which is the ministry of multiculturalism, as far as so-called multiculturalists go. People accept Lord Krishna — a blue god — in the film, but they don't accept the Mounties. 'Why did you have to use the Mounties that way?' They have no trouble accepting Lord Krishna.

Whether I'm a Canadian or an Indian is irrelevant. That kind of nation-state way of dividing culture is irrelevant to my personal experience. If you can't subscribe to the dominant definition, then either you spend your life banging away at that door, or it becomes irrelevant to you.

Cineaction: But it can't be irrelevant to you because you directly take on those Canadian master narratives — the heroism and justice of the mounties, the benevolence of the ministry of multiculturalism —

Krishna: Yeah, but I wrote this script to be set in England, too. And it was cricket, and the Bobbies instead of the Mounties. So the film deals with the icons of Canada. I still feel as alienated as I ever did.

How different is Canada from America than Texas is from the rest of America? It's very hard to say this is Canadian when that whole idea, that whole metanarrative has just crumbled miserably. I don't know, I don't have a soundbite for that.

Cineaction: I know you've said the audience for *Masala* is unformed, or forming with its release, but even with that incomplete sense, what do you want audiences to take away from watching the film?

Krishna: I thought that was what I was telling you for the last two hours.

Cineaction: Well, a soundbite would be good now.

Krishna: I think I want people to ask what I asked very early on, the question of the film. Who is the author of the world we live in? And what story are we going to tell now to explain the world back to ourselves? So the question may be can we really understand each other. Comedies, tragedies, all those old familiar ways of telling each other stories don't make sense, because there are people who don't understand your comedies or your tragedies. And it's imperative that you communicate to them now. They're not going to hide in their colonial hovels any more, so you have to address it. Again, that's not a soundbite.



The Far Shore by Joyce Wieland

The Melodramatic Imagination in Quebec and Canadian Women's Feature Films

by Brenda Longfellow

Ten years ago, I wrote an article on feminist feature films in Quebec in which I contrasted the relative paucity of dramatic features directed by Anglo Canadian women to the emerging tradition in Quebec.¹ I went on to suggest that this imbalance had a great deal to do with different provincial funding agencies and, critically, with the emphasis on language and cultural production as the central concerns of the women's movement in Quebec compared to more immediately political utilitarian approach of Canadian feminists.

In eight years, a great deal has changed. With the success of films like *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, *My American Cousin*, *Loyalties* and *Sifted Evidence*, a determined generation of Anglo Canadian women filmmakers committed to dramatic production has indis-

putably arrived. In Quebec, new filmmakers like Lea Pool have emerged and older filmmakers such as Mireille Dansereau and Micheline Lanctôt have continued to produce, with difficulty and over extended periods of time, second and third features. What is indeed remarkable is that in the period up to 1982, only Anne Claire Poirier succeeded in directing more than one feature and this largely due to her sinecure at the National Film Board.²

More often than not, the experience of near bankruptcy entailed in the production of the first feature coupled with the frustrations of limited distribution and hostile critical response made it extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to embark on a second feature adventure. As has been well documented in the case of Joyce Wieland, her experience with *The Far Shore* led her to withdraw from filmmaking altogether.³ It is only very recently with a series of short experimental works that Wieland has made a reappearance. Today, we can happily identified filmmakers with developing bodies of work: the abstract and richly formal explorations of the female psyche and the associations of madness and creativity in the work of Lea Pool; the strong regional insistence in the family melodramas of Ann Wheeler; and the concern with the oppressive factors of language and institutionalized definitions of identity that have marked the films of Patricia Gruben.

The development of feature films by women is obviously linked to the cycle of boom and bust of the Canadian feature industry as a whole and to the relative health (prognosis: critical) of our distribution and exhibition sectors. Whether the current conservative era of cutbacks and privatization will remain hospitable to women interested in dramatic features remains open to question, particularly as these films are almost entirely dependent on state support: provincial and federal funding agencies, art councils and CBC or RADIO CANADA. In a study commissioned by *Toronto Women in Film and Video*, it was found that nine percent of the \$7.25 million handed out to Canadian producers by Telefilm Canada in 1987/88 went to women and that women represent nine percent of directors and 15 percent of writers on projects that received Telefilm investment. (*Globe and Mail*, March 10, 1990). One cause for optimism are the provincial funding agencies, such as SIDIC in Quebec and the OFDC in Ontario, which have proven themselves willing to take slightly more risks with innovative and new filmmakers than their federal counterpart — Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* being a case in point. However, from a cursory and decidedly non-scientific survey of women working in this field, several in Quebec felt that the continued existence of the "cinéma d'auteurs," the personal, independent and strongly indigenous cinema of modest means, was becoming increasingly impossible. Given the current political economy where priority is given to broadcast licences and co-production deals, there is a distinct danger that the cultural aspects of filmmaking will be overshadowed by profit-making concerns.

There is an obvious danger in dealing with a territory as diverse and wide ranging in imagination and approach as women's features in one survey article without diluting and undervaluing important differences of politics and aesthetics. For the remainder of this article I will take a look at a limited

group of four films drawn from this recent body of work which embody a certain thematic consistency, namely, an appropriation and exploitation of melodrama. These are: *The Far Shore*, dir. Joyce Wieland, 1976; *Loyalties*, dir. Ann Wheeler, 1986; *L'Arrache Cœur*, dir. Mireille Dansereau, 1979; and *Ann Trister*, dir. Lea Pool, 1985. My intention is not to pose melodrama as an essentially feminine genre or as a reified body of generic conventions but to demonstrate its flexibility as an interpretive grid as it is transposed into different discursive contexts. While the four films I will be examining share certain conventions, their individual appropriations of melodrama occur in very different manners.

Melodrama, from the gothic romances of Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters to afternoon television soaps, has long been a privileged object of feminist inquiry in both film and literary theory. Feminist interest in the genre has stemmed from the recognition that melodrama, from its inception, has addressed a female spectator, both in relation to specific marketing strategies⁴ and to the genre's "feminized" narrative content, its characterization and commonplace plot complications which concern the realm of the domestic: the family, romance, children, lovers and the struggle of women daring to move from this space into the public realm.

Melodramatic texts are useful cultural artefacts, not simply because they reproduce dominant cultural definitions but precisely because of the manner in which these dominant definitions are weighted with ideological contradictions that the melodramatic text cannot resolve. On one level, in Hollywood melodramas of the forties and fifties narrative conflicts are habitually and classically resolved through the renewed integration of the family. Stray desire is tamed and the previously wavering power of the patriarch is re-established. However, as Jacquelyn Suter, among others, has argued this demand for narrative closure runs counter to strong representations of female independence and desire resulting in the text being split into two conflicting discourses.⁵ Patriarchal order may be re-established through narrative closure but this ending, as it occurs in the films of Douglas Sirk, for example, is ironic and excessive, serving to denaturalize power and to suggest a trenchant critique of the bourgeois family.

The appropriation of the genre, with all its attendant ideological contradictions by feminist filmmakers, is obviously not a case of simple repetition of the Hollywood formula, for these films are specifically addressed to the working through

1. Brenda Longfellow, *Cinetracts*, 1982. *Madeline Is*, Dir. Sylvia Spring, 1970; *The Far Shore*, Dir. Joyce Wieland, 1976; *I Maureen*, Dir. Janine Manatis, 1978. Actually the first feature directed by a Canadian woman was *Back to God's Country*, directed by Nell Shipman who wrote, produced, directed and starred in the film.

2. *Mourir à Tue Tête*, 1979, and *Les Quarantaine*, 1989, were the two dramatic features directed by Poirier.

3. See Kay Armatage, "Joyce Wieland, Feminist Documentary, and the Body of the Work," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1989; and Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Films of Joyce Wieland," in *Joyce Wieland*, Toronto, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1987.

4. See in particular, Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

5. Jacquelyn Suter, "Feminine Discourse in Christopher Strong," *Camera Obscura*, vol. 3-4.

6. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't / Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University, p. 157.



The Far Shore by Joyce Wieland

of female desire. The collective characterization of female protagonists, the mise-en-scène, the specific allowance and space given to alternative female fantasies, relates to the very different discursive and political starting point of these films.

Feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis once called for feminist films that were not anti-œdipal but œdipal with a vengeance,⁶ films that turned the tables on conventional patterns of identification and desire. In the four films I will be discussing, œdipal vengeance is certainly a trenchant characteristic and one, furthermore, that carries the critique of the bourgeois family and cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity into very different territories. While *The Far Shore* is the only film in this series to focus on the impossibility of the romantic heterosexual couple, all the others constitute female relationships to other females as their narrative premise and psychic core, a move which displaces classical œdipal trajectories and which suggests a subversive utopianism. I have mentioned difference here using the standard of the male-authored classical melodrama of Hollywood, but there are obviously differences between and within these films which bear on differences of race, of class, and of culture, and it is to these differences that I will now turn in a discussion of the individual films.

THE FAR SHORE

Set in the 1920's, *The Far Shore* reinvents the tragic romantic tale of Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven painter whose sudden death remains an unresolved mystery. Wieland uses this resonant tale of the Canadian wilderness to invest a spectacularly gothic tale of Eulalie, a spurned Quebecois beauty who marries Ross, an Anglo entrepreneur who whisks her off to a stifling ancestral home. There, Eulalie languishes in boredom, playing sombre pieces on the piano until she meets Tom, a free-spirited soul-mate whose paintings are being purchased as investments by her husband. When Tom departs on an extended canoe trip to avoid the complications of their burgeoning love, Eulalie lapses into melancholic catatonia. Finally, one day at her husband's summer retreat Tom is sighted and she leaps into the water to swim to him. Pursuit is immediate, however, and after a gloriously sensual (and oh so Canadian) bout of lovemaking in the sensual recesses of a northern lake, Eulalie and Tom are followed and precipitously shot by Ross's hard drinking companion.

Wieland's debt to the melodramatic tradition extends far beyond the gothic proportions of her narrative, as her commentators have pointed out.⁷ Her use of matting, iris effects

and elaborate fade in and outs mimic the techniques of early silent film melodramas. Her most purposeful citation occurs during the canoe chase scene at the end of the film where the single piano score and the tempo of cross cutting bears ironic reference to Griffith and the likes of *The Perils of Pauline*.

These ironic citations of cinematic reflexivity obviously distance the film from any realist tradition and certainly demand some profound reconsiderations of the realist debate as it has been pursued within film theory. Indeed, as Christine Gledhill has pointed out, the entire melodramatic tradition steers a very intriguing course between the realist tradition and an overt postmodern deconstruction:

While the drive of realism is to possess the world by understanding it, and the modern and post-modern explore in different ways the consequences of this ambitious disillusion, the central drive of melodrama is to force meaning and identity from the inadequacies of language...⁸

While melodrama roots itself in the representation, as Gledhill puts it, "of the material world of everyday reality and lived experience," its intent is to undermine any simple association of representation and reality by insisting on meanings that are inaccessible and irreducible to linguistic conventions. Peter Brooks, whose book *The Melodramatic Imagination* has become a locus classicus for the theorization of melodrama, refers to the melodramatic text as "a text of muteness," arguing that the genre's founding characteristic is its consistent reference to the limitlessness of meaning which lies outside of language.⁹ As language is rendered duplicitous and unstable in this tradition, Brooks continues, the responsibility for conveying significance is shifted onto other registers which are nonverbal, gestural, theatrical and expressionist.

A more fitting description of *The Far Shore* could not be found, for it is a film which is premised on the failure of language, a film whose articulateness is far more invested in its minute attention to detail and objects within the frame,¹⁰ and in the visceral painterly quality of the lighting.

The other salient characteristic which situates *The Far Shore* in the melodramatic tradition is its use of broadly sketched character types. One of the displacements that the text of muteness effects, according to Brooks, is to use characters as types which are denied any illusion of depth, interiority or psychological complexity in order to theatricalize moral and ethical conflicts. The characters in *The Far Shore* are clearly markers of larger social forces, their presence conveyed less through a sense of their interiority than through an excessively broad acting style and characterization. This absence of depth in characterization is supported by the camera movements within the frame which usually occur across strictly horizontal or vertical lines, where the landscape functions as a backdrop to characters who appear dwarfed by its timelessness.

Eulalie and Tom are associated with art, sexual liberation and, most importantly, with a philosophy in which the individual is related to the landscape in a bond of spiritual and aesthetic rapport. For Tom, this rapport is signalled by his affiliation with the Group of Seven, the first highly significant non-realist tradition in Canadian landscape painting. As dis-

tinguished from the realist tradition, landscape is transformed in the work of the Group of Seven into something other, a psychically resonant mythic space which insists on its own ineffability.

Beyond the specific nature of Tom's art practice, neither Tom nor Eulalie presumes a hierarchical relation to nature: dogs are considered equals and invited to the table, raccoons nestle in their canoes and nature remains a source of romantic inspiration. Even desire for each other is constituted as an extension and embodiment of this philosophy: the ultimate scene of consummation occurring literally through the individual's assimilation into the landscape as their two bodies are entwined and submerged in the lake, the gesture of lovemaking occurring without a word being exchanged.

By contrast, Ross and his associates are painted with the same broadly sketched brushstrokes as representatives of those social forces — advocates of technology as the new secular religion — that George Grant lamented as being responsible for the dissolution of Canada as a distinctive nation. Ross and his college comrade are engineers, technocrats and capitalists whose relation to nature is purely instrumental.

The Far Shore's reliance on this series of binary opposites to structure its universe of meaning constitutes the film as a morality play where good confronts evil and is sadly and tragically defeated. The decimation of any alternative philosophical option to the technocratic will to power is predicted through the momentum of the narrative which moves relentlessly to the final murders of Tom and Eulalie. What counters the narrative victory of the forces of technocracy, however, is the profound sense of melancholy and loss which attends the final scenes of the film, a loss inscribed on the side of the inexpressible. The presence of a certain weight of meaning beyond the limitations of language is also evoked in scenes where the contemplation of nature, of the glorious northern lakes and wilderness, operates as a silent and counterpunctal force to the progression of narrative and alludes to the possibility, by their very extensive duration, of other modes of organizing time and space.

The space of otherness in the film, of that otherness to language, is also, and most significantly, associated with the representation of female desire. The working through of desire in the film is centred on the figure of Eulalie who embodies the narrative image of desire, as Wieland herself, has posed it: "If you were looking for a single picture to describe the movie, I'd say it was a picture of Eulalie dressed in her long blue skirt, white blouse and straw hat, standing by the water." Eulalie is also increasingly constituted in the film as a subject and agent of desire, it is her action: jumping into the lake, which sets the final narrative movement in motion. That her desire can only exist outside of language, however, is con-

6. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't / Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University, p. 157.

7. See Armata, op.cit., and Rabinovitz, op.cit.

8. Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is, Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill, London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1987, p. 33.

9. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

10. An indication of this exactitude is the 2000 watercolour storyboards that Wieland painted for the film.

veyed most graphically in the scene where Eulalie visits Tom in his cabin, picks up his magnifying glass and mouths something to him to which he responds in kind. Here, communication is most broadly gestural, the movement of the mouths straining toward but stopping short of language.

The articulation of her desire is also displaced into other signifying registers, specifically, through certain visual cinematic techniques. After Tom has fled into the wilderness, a close-up shot reveals Eulalie lying on her bed in a darkened room. As she languishes in a deep depression (particularly after Ross's misguided effort to pin her melancholy on the loss of her former fiancé) the camera irises down, framing her face in an extreme close up. This shot dissolves into a white disc on which is superimposed the image of a canoe, drifting across a lake. The camera irises out to reveal Tom in the canoe. This series of dissolves and irises links the two romantically and, as Lauren Rabinovitz suggests, may be ascribed to Eulalie's subjectivity as "a subjective sexual daydream."¹¹

The silence associated with Eulalie's desire is carried through to the final sequence of the film where after the shots have been fired, the camera traces the surface of water in a long pan, recording Tom's body floating face down. The pan continues but only discloses Eulalie's hat, the onscreen marker of her disappearance. Rabinovitz's suggestion that this absence of Eulalie's body, "ruptures melodramatic closure" through its allusion to "an as yet unactualized territory,"¹² powerfully reaffirms *The Far Shore's* affinity with the melodramatic tradition's concern with transcending the constraints of dominant culture.

LOYALTIES

While the abstraction of the characters and the fatal romantic arc of the narrative in *The Far Shore* all constitute the film on a certain mythic level, *Loyalties* enters far more deeply into the representational contradictions of melodrama. On one level the film's gritty social issue realism, its "rootedness in the material reality of everyday life" place it in the Canadian television and film tradition of docudrama. However, the film's gothic narrative elements, its condensed symbolization and its villain, a stereotypic characterization, situate the film as possessing significantly different derivations. It is this difference that produces the film's doubled meaning, so characteristic of melodrama where the text operates, as Gledhill points out, "both on an imaginary level, internal to fictional production, and on a realist level, which refers to the world outside the text."¹³

One of the aims of melodrama, as I have argued, is to exploit the representations of the real in order to indicate and point to the existence at the edge of the frame of unrepresented and repressed meaning. In *Loyalties*, the repressed is associated with what lies beyond the appearance of familial normality: male aggression and sexual violence.

The film begins with an archetypic gothic scene: a dark and stormy night, rain beating on the window of what appears to be an isolated cottage. A young child in a yellow macintosh runs up to the window and looks in, the camera

aligning itself with his perspective. A man in a suit and another figure, whose identity is obscured, are struggling. The camera cuts to a side table which features a smiling family portrait of a husband and wife which suddenly, ominously, falls to the floor and shatters. All the exaggerated and overblown conventions of melodrama are brought together here with a flourish: a family secret, the violence and perversion of the home accentuated by the violence of the rainstorm and the opaqueness of the night. The scene, however, remains completely unanchored in any kind of narrative context. It serves rather to introduce mood and tone, an atmosphere of darkness and a sense of fatalism drawn through the association of male violence with the uncontrollable forces of nature.

This atmosphere is completely contrasted by the next sequence which features a small airplane flying over Lac LaBiche in northern Alberta. A (very) British woman, Lily, stares out the window holding a baby and attends to her other two children. She arrives to a warm welcome from the natives who welcome her to the bush, proffering T-shirts which proclaim, "Where the Hell is Lac LaBiche?" and hugging her unrestrainedly. Her husband David's greeting is much more restrained as he whispers "I wasn't sure you were coming." He has got himself appointed as the town's doctor and finds the isolation congenial to his purposes. In the contrast between these first two sequences, the film constructs a classic melodramatic dialectic between the said and the unsaid, between the appearance of domestic unity and its gothic underside. As Gledhill observes:

Characteristically the melodramatic plot turns on an initial, often deliberately engineered, misrecognition of the innocence of a central protagonist. By definition the innocent cannot use the powers available to the villain; following the dictates of their nature, they must become victims, a position legitimated by a range of devices which rationalise their apparent inaction in their own behalf. Narrative is then progressed through a struggle for clear moral identification of all protagonists and is finally resolved by public recognition of where guilt and innocence really lie.¹⁴

The narrative of *Loyalties* is propelled by the necessity of exposing this dark family secret condensed around the figure of David, which leads inexorably and fatally to the final climax where appearances will be reconciled with underlying reality. Narrative suspense builds through the progressive accretion of suspicions concerning the actual motivations and desires of this character as these are raised through David's intensifying interest in the young Métis girl, Leona. The scenes with Leona take on an ominous character such as the scene where David is seen cavorting with Leona in the lake, picking her up again and again. At one level, the scene represents, to the innocent observer, simple family fun. On the other, the dark current of sexuality lends the scene its duplicitous quality.

This fatalism of the narrative climaxes at the end of the film when Lily and Roseanne go off to celebrate Lily's birthday and Leona is left to babysit Lily's children. The rain and thunder of the scene immediately link it to the film's opening

sequence and this mise-en-abyme is compounded by the ancient horror flick Leonora is watching on television, with its chilling soundtrack of screams and organ music. David suddenly returns early from a fishing trip and proceeds to ply Leonora with champagne and flattery. Eventually his veneer of gentleness explodes as he tears off the child's blouse and rapes her on the front lawn just as Lily and Roseanne are returning from their night out.

The other dynamic which structures the film, often against this narrative pull, is the exploration of the differences — economic, cultural and sexual — between the two central protagonists: Lily, the "lily white" British upper-class wife and Roseanne (Tantoo Cardinal), the Métis, a more or less single mother who is engaged to work as a domestic in Lily's house. While this exploration involves a certain linearity as it traces the developing friendship and intimacy between the two women through the endlessly recurring cycle of women's chatter concerning everyday life, this dynamic generally works against the relentlessness of narrative progression.

The differences between the two women are articulated structurally through the movement of parallel editing. This parallel rhythm begins with the sequence where Lily and her family arrive at the town's only hotel. As they are having dinner, the scene cuts to the hotel's noisy beverage room where Roseanne is working as a waitress. Not for long, however, as she is dismissed when her inebriated husband takes a swing

at her face, necessitating calling in the good doctor to administer stitches. The strained formal politesse of the middle-class family is immediately contrasted to the explosive violence and fatalism of the Métis family.

This counterpunctal rhythm is repeated throughout the film in a series of paired sequences. Different attitudes towards sexuality are dealt with in the paired sequences which first reveal the frustrations of Lily and David, which is subsequently contrasted with the sexual reconciliation of Roseanne and her estranged husband, Billy, which is tender and toughly passionate. Another of these paired sequences features the informality of a dinner at Roseanne's mother's home where the children are fully integrated and family solidarity is conveyed through the warm lighting and crowded frame. This is contrasted to the stiff formal dinner endured by Lily and her husband where the children are absent, the china and crystal are perfect and the meal is eaten without a word being exchanged. The emotional distance between the husband and wife is supported by the formal composition where each is seated at the end of a very long table.

These contrasts are soldered through another kind of temporality which works toward, not a suspension of these dif-

12. Rabinovitz, *op.cit.*, p. 177.

13. Rabinovitz, *op.cit.*, p. 178.

14. Gledhill, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

15. Gledhill, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

L'Arrache Cœur, by Mireille Dansereau





L'Arrache Cœur, by Mireille Dansereau

ferences between the two women — the film, in fact, insists on the impossibility of any such suspension in scenes where Roseanne warns Lily "not to start making speeches about the happy poor" or in a fragment of voice-over where Roseanne informs Billy that "the only difference between her and me is money...but what a hell of a difference!" — but toward mutual recognition and solidarity.

The question of loyalties comes to the fore at the end of the film when Roseanne, seeking revenge for David's violation of her daughter, enters his home to shoot him. Lily's first instinctual response is to protect her husband and she grabs a vase and smashes Roseanne over the head. The next morning the police arrive at Roseanne's and inform her that Lily would like her to press charges against David. Lily's loyalties have shifted as she arrives at Roseanne's, finding it impossible to stay with her husband. The film closes with a utopian image of female bonding as the two enter Roseanne's house with their arms around each other.

L'ARRACHE CŒUR

Tracing the melodramatic imagination in Quebec women's features, we can observe that the social impulses of the Anglo Canadian feature are less important than the melodramatic attentiveness to interiorized psychological domain. The films possess a similar kind of representational obsessiveness with

meaning and significance which remains at the boundaries of language but this material is much more rooted in unconscious psychic elements.

At one level, however, *L'Arrache Cœur* is clearly rooted in the material reality of women's experience. The film focuses on the very real and concrete difficulties that Celine, a working mother, confronts in dealing with the tensions of the domestic — a demanding toddler and the fragile ego of her husband, Andre, a Chilean exile and frustrated filmmaker who is resentful of the domestic demands placed on him as the non-wage earning member of the household. The film gives equal attention to the obstacles that Celine deals with at work as a director which involve the pressures of the double day and a working environment and a boss who are unsympathetic to her needs as a mother. The sequencing of the scenes which emphasize the fragile and complex relations the female protagonist is forced to negotiate between the public and private spheres of society resonates with the classical elements of the melodramatic tradition. What is given equal emphasis, however, are the highly symbolized fantasies, sexual reveries and memories which compose the central psychic reality and trauma defining Celine's melancholy and unease: her relationship to her mother.

Recent feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theory have emphatically shifted the male centred bias of the theory through the focus on the mother/daughter relationship as the primordial cause of female subjectivity — often in highly idealized terms. Celine's relation to her mother in *L'Arrache*

Cœur, by contrast, is represented as being highly ambivalent. She complains of her mother's egocentricism and lack of concern for her grandson, yet responds to her mother's attempt to give advice or to establish regular meetings with feelings of being suffocated and oppressed. She both over-identifies with her mother, imagining that she too is developing the breast cancer that had once afflicted her mother, and yet insists on the distinctiveness of her own difference. She insists on being treated as an adult by her mother and yet finds herself continuously arrested and regressing to the psychic level of her four-year-old self who was displaced from the centre of her mother's affections through the birth of her sister.

This psychic trauma is most emphatically condensed in an almost Bergmanesque fantasy where the sister reclines completely naked in a gauzy ethereal setting as the mother strokes and caresses her body. Celine's place within this fantasy is clearly relegated to that of the spectator, irrevocably other to the scene of desire.

This psychic material is not simply represented by these discrete sequences of fantasy but spills over and repeats itself in all of Celine's relations in everyday life. Her resentment and conflictual feelings toward her mother are consistently displaced to all women in positions of authority: her psychoanalyst, her boss. Even her husband is not immune from this process of displacement as is represented in a long dissolve, following the scene of their attempted lovemaking, when Andre's face is merged into that of the mother.

ANNE TRISTER

Anne Trister begins with the death of Ann's father and a dreamlike funeral procession through the desert. A woman sings a Yiddish dirge and a small group of mourners huddle around an open grave in the midst of an infinite expanse of blowing sand, the scene, an archaic ritual out of time. The credits follow over a close-up shot of the sand blowing, ripples and shapes forming and reforming in ephemeral patterns. Thus begins the film's dominant signifying chain which links the image of sand, memory and the utopian white space of the desert.

It is the desert and the internment of her father that provokes Ann's exile — both psychic and physical — as she leaves Lausanne for Montreal. her exile takes shape symbolically as a reversed oedipal movement — away from the father and toward the other woman, for it is this chain of desert and memory which eventually binds Ann to Alix — a Montreal child psychoanalyst. Ann eventually moves in with Alix, and the two pass their first night together sharing their memories of the desert, Alix confessing that she too journeyed there as a young woman and continues to dream of its irresistible majesty. Their memories begin to merge into a shared fantasy of the desert, a symbolic foreshadowing of their eventual physical merger. If, as we have argued, the symbolic excess is produced through the melodramatic text's straining toward meanings which are contrary to socially legitimated dis-

Anne Trister, by Léa Pool



course, here the movement is centred on the desire which cannot be named: the lesbian attraction between Alix and Ann.

As should be evident from my description of *Anne Trister's* highly symbolic opening, the film is engaged in a definite suspension of the "material rootedness in everyday life." This is true both of the narrative movement of the film, the binding of the associational elements and of the particular composition of space within the frame where Montreal is rendered as an abstract postmodern landscape, far removed from the very documentary treatment of a Montreal "quartier" in *L'Arrache Cœur*.

The film is also involved in a very different appropriation of melodrama. While in *L'Arrache Cœur* the excess of melodramatic expression is condensed in sequences of fantasy and dream, in *Anne Trister*, as in all of Lea Pool's films, the ineffable is displaced into the process of art making and into very specific associational chains of symbolic motifs. The principle of unconscious association, in fact, governs the structure of the film, overdetermining the contiguity of shots and suggesting a different sort of temporality: the nonlinear and circular time of desire. The condensed effect carried by these associational chains and often overwrought images (a bird caught in Anne's studio, red paint dripping) clearly related to what Gledhill has suggested is "melodrama's over-investment in the symbol, combined with the impossibility of actually living it."¹⁶

The film's allegorical status is also conveyed through a parallel editing structure which alternates Anne's story and the story of the autistic child, Sara, who is being treated by Alix. Both begin as emotionally withdrawn characters and both discover a cure through the care of Alix and through the therapeutic process of art-making. Ann is given a studio in a giant abandoned industrial space by a friend and begins to transform this space by covering the entire walls, floors and ceilings of the cavernous room with stencil designs and slides of three-dimensional images. Therapy here involves the discovery of a new art form, liberated from the constrictions of the frame that had previously oppressed her, as she had confessed to her art professor in Lausanne. Significantly, it is an abstract and non-representational form of art that provides the field for the character's working through of desire, a form where the monumentality of the project, its texture, volume and design create significance outside the restraints of language.

The associations between Sara and Anne are developed as well through a series of paired sequences which echo each other in gesture and dramatic tone. In one of these sequences, Sara holds Alix's face, tracing her features with her fingers. She places her fingers in Alix's mouth, retracts them and tastes Alix's saliva in a frankly sexual gesture. She then opens Alix's blouse to feel her heartbeat, but Alix, needing to draw her own boundaries, holds the child's hands by the wrists. Sara runs away in despair. This gesture of Alix's is repeated in the sequence where Anne kisses Alex on the lips, in a gesture redolent with sexual significance. Ann responds to the rejection like a child, through an attempt to destroy her art.

Her recovery is imminent, however, but not before she falls from the scaffolding, ends up in the hospital, and the building where her studio is located is sold to developers and

torn down. While Anne is devastated when she hears this news, her experience has served its purpose as cathartic transition and opened her again to the possibilities of beauty and love. It is in the moment of mourning the loss of her art that she turns to Alix, who does not sexually reject her this time. This turn to another woman constitutes the negativity of the film's oedipal passage and by negativity I mean critique and negation of the inevitability of a desire centred on the symbolic figure of the father and his surrogates. Situating the woman as other and object of desire carries Anne into a new psychic equilibrium where she becomes capable of reconstituting the space around her with alternative symbolic markers.

All things do indeed prove to be ephemeral in the circular movement of the text. In the last scene, Alix receives a package from Anne which is full of sand from the desert and a super 8 cassette which features Ann moving through the fantasy space of the desert. By the end, the symbolism of the desert shifts and changes. It is no longer a no man's land, site of the internment of the father's body, but a space of shared female fantasy and of an otherness which is spiritually replenishing.

CONCLUSION

It has not been my intention to pose these films as in any way exemplary or representative of the range of feature films currently being produced by women in Quebec and Canada. Clearly, there are many works that have no relation to melodrama, and even the diversity of cinematic strategies employed by these four films strains any attempt to place all of them within a single interpretive grid. What I hope to have provided, in the virtual absence of any critical work done on most of these films and in the presence of critical hostility where films such as *Loyalties* have been dismissed for their devotion to convention, is a theoretical frame for thinking the films' difference.

Reading films such as *Loyalties* and *The Far Shore* with the assistance of recent feminist theories of melodrama allows one to demonstrate that the films' excessive citation of the gothic and melodramatic tradition creates a critical tension which works to subvert any presumption of realism. Beyond this issue of representational reflexivity, melodrama provides a congenial frame for considering how feminist discourse and the possibility of female desire are deployed through specific cinematic strategies. In *The Far Shore* and *Loyalties*, I argued that feminist discourse emerged as a transgression and interruption of the archetypal plot lines of female victimization through an emphasis on mise-en-scène and composition in the former, and through the development of an alternate momentum of developing female solidarity in the latter. In *Anne Trister* and *L'Arrache Cœur*, representational tensions around realism are increasingly transcended in the densely allegorical and symbolic aesthetic of each film. And in each of these, an alternate economy of desire is traced through the condensation of identification and affect around the mother in *L'Arrache Cœur* and around the figure of the other woman in *Anne Trister*.

16. Gledhill, op cit., p. 35.

Secret Nation
Michael Jones



Oh What a Night
Eric Till



Being at home with Claude
Jean Beaudin



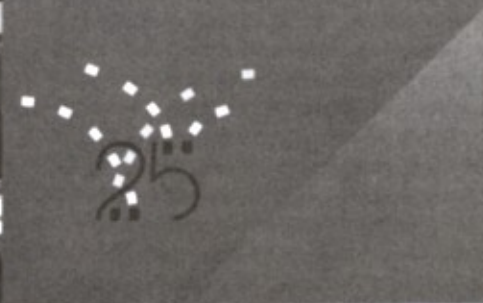
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Montreal Confidential

NOTES ON AN IMAGINED CITY

by Will Straw

IMAGINING THE MEANWHILE...

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd-fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.

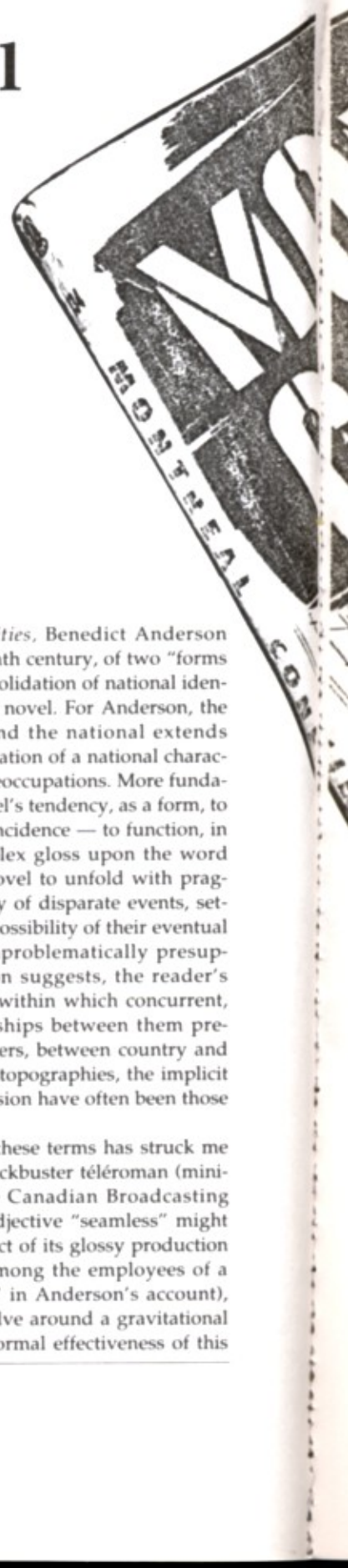
— Benedict Anderson¹

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes the rise, in the eighteenth century, of two "forms of imagining" central to the consolidation of national identities (p. 30). One of these is the novel. For Anderson, the link between the novelistic and the national extends beyond any given novel's articulation of a national character or thematizing of national preoccupations. More fundamentally, it is evident in the novel's tendency, as a form, to produce a sense of temporal coincidence — to function, in Anderson's words, as a "complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'" (p. 30). For the novel to unfold with pragmatic efficiency, the simultaneity of disparate events, settings and characters — and the possibility of their eventual interconnection — must be unproblematically presupposed. This requires, Anderson suggests, the reader's sense of a shared, social space within which concurrent,

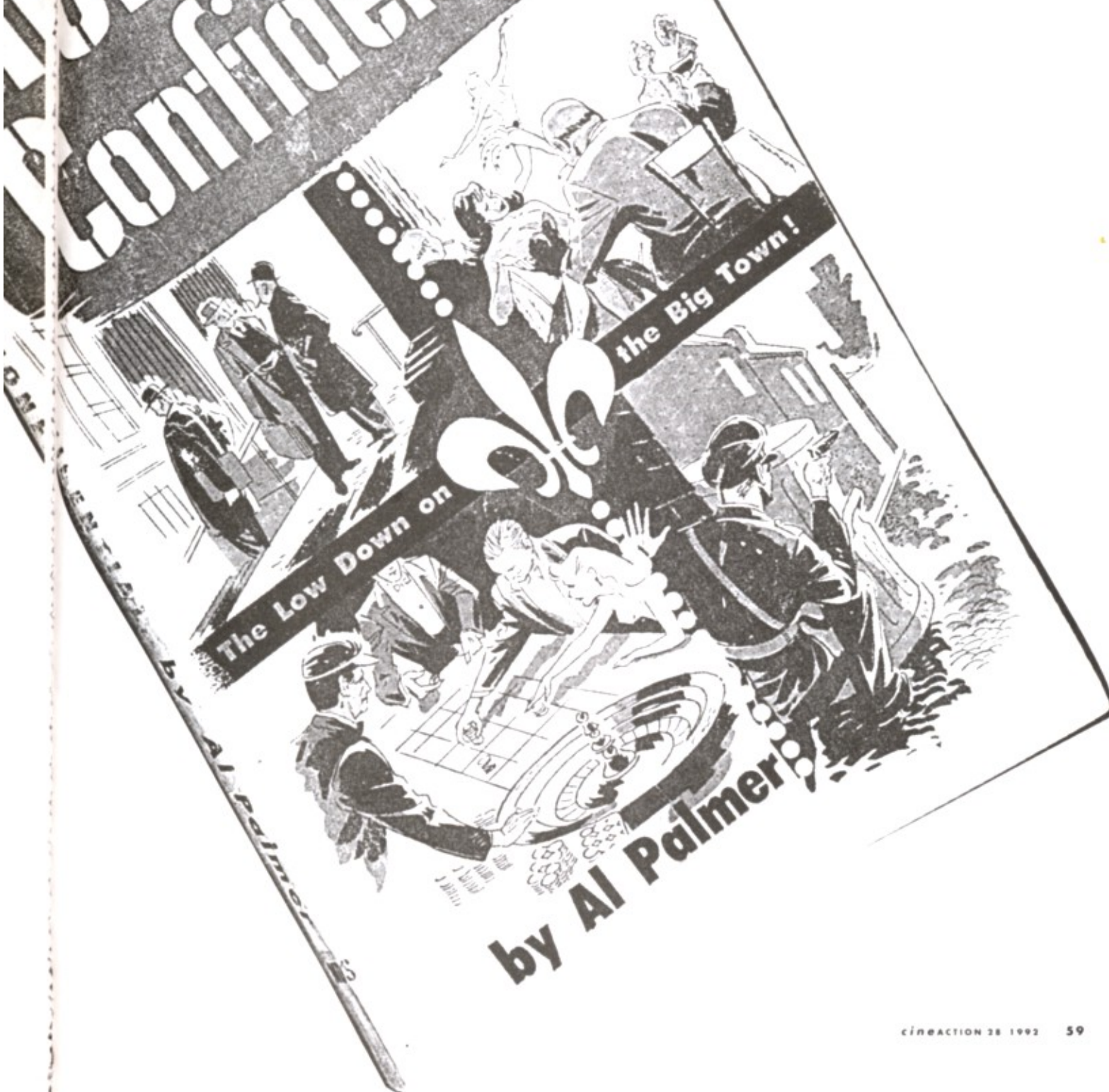
parallel actions are circumscribed and relationships between them presumed. As novels move up and down class ladders, between country and city and across their distinctive spatial and social topographies, the implicit boundaries which limit their dispersion into confusion have often been those of the nation.

The usefulness of conceiving the novelistic in these terms has struck me repeatedly while watching *Scoop*, this season's blockbuster téléroman (mini-series) on the French-language network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Scoop* is a program for which the adjective "seamless" might have been invented, and this is not simply an effect of its glossy production values or taut, crisp editing. Set in Montreal, among the employees of a newspaper (the other great "form of imagining" in Anderson's account), *Scoop*'s multiple narratives of newsgathering revolve around a gravitational centre which ensures their interconnection. The formal effectiveness of this

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso 1983, p. 31).



OUTBREAK!
Confidential



The Low Down on

the Big Town!

by Al Palmer

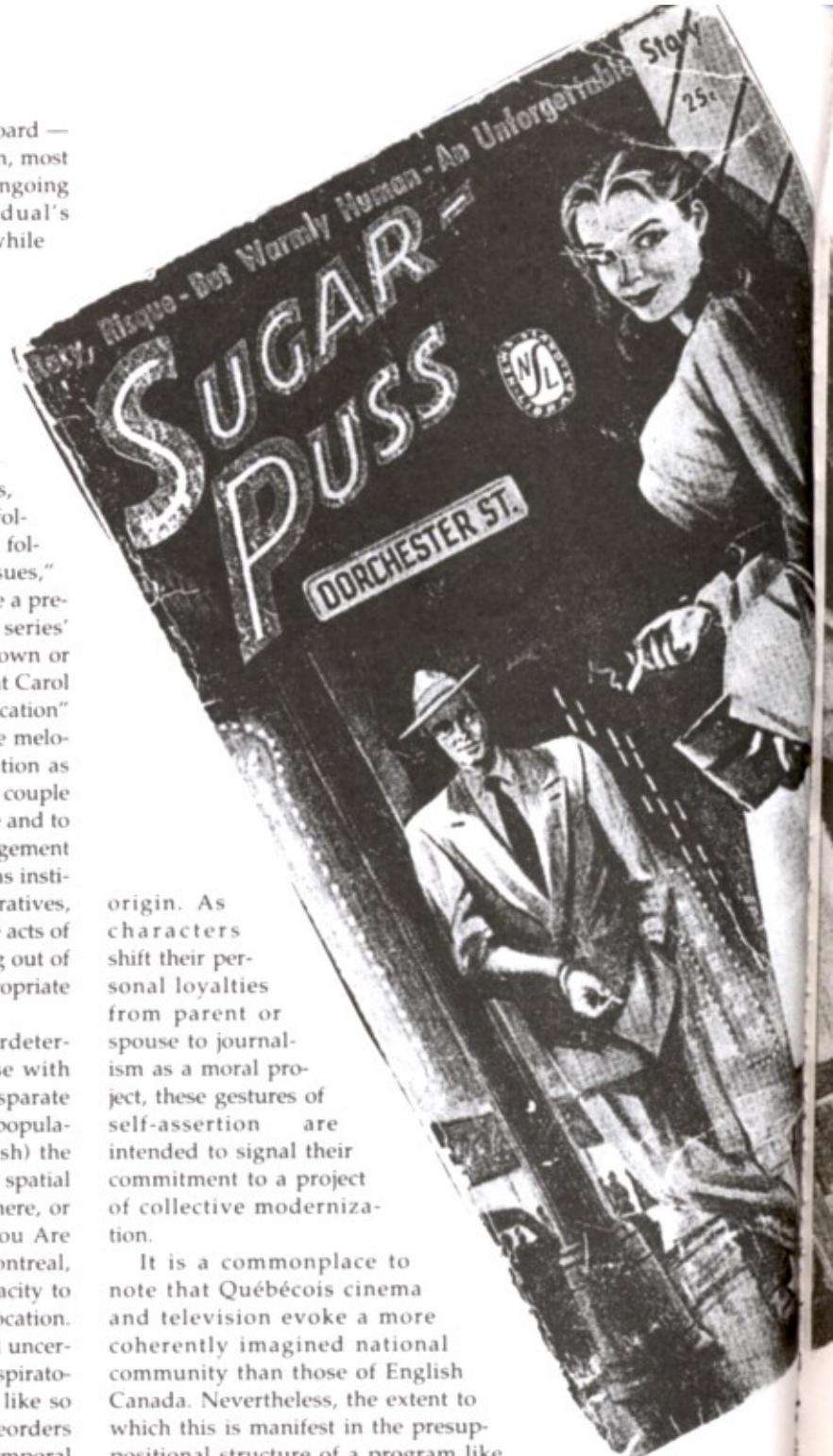
fictional device — the newsroom as narrative switchboard — has long been established by the cinema and television, most notably within the series format. It allows for the ongoing generation of plotlines which repeat the individual's encounter with social fragmentation and conflict, while holding out the promise that these will be rendered intelligible within the newspaper's collective, institutional reading of the social and its needs. At the same time, the newspaper genre is typically one in which the spatial mapping of urban life is articulated to the ongoing development of character over time.

It is here that the symptomatic usefulness of *Scoop* may be located. Like many urban newspaper narratives, *Scoop* sets up its many narrative threads (of reporters following stories) as dramas of moral awakening. *Scoop* follows a checklist of widely-acknowledged urban "issues," such as child abuse or poverty, making of each of these a pretext for the refinement and complexification of the series' principal characters. The uncovering of social breakdown or dysfunction initiates, for most of these characters, what Carol L. Bernstein has called the "enterprise of self-authentication" common within urban fictions.² Like many prime-time melodramas, *Scoop* implicitly defines this self-authentication as the capacity to withdraw from those bonds of family, couple or anachronistic prejudice which limit the ability to see and to judge. Across a variety of characters, these acts of judgement serve to elaborate the ethical stance of the newspaper as institution. In *Scoop*, as in any number of newspaper narratives, this stance is that of a benevolent reformism, but in the acts of disassociation which sustain it one can see the working out of a larger question: that of the moral vantage point appropriate to a modernized, national collectivity.

In this respect, the seamlessness of *Scoop* is overdetermined by one of its most elusive qualities: the ease with which its novelistic "meanwhile" is able to order disparate political positions, geographical locations and urban populations. *Scoop* presumes (rather than having to establish) the shared possession by its viewers of social, political and spatial maps, upon which the distances between here and there, or the deviant and normal are clearly marked. The "You Are Here" of these maps is downtown, Francophone Montreal, but one of *Scoop*'s most impressive features is its capacity to effortlessly align moral position with geographical location. Ottawa and Québec City are places of exile and moral uncertainty; Outremont, behind the mountain, is where conspiratorial efforts to acquire power are launched. As well, like so many Québecois films and television series, *Scoop* reorders geographical and moral difference in terms of their temporal relation to a punctual historical present. Ruthless, crude businessmen from the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River are residual reminders of an older collective moment, anachronistic in their attitudes towards the national question and issues of cultural diversity. Illegal immigrants constitute an emergent, modern challenge, the variety of responses to which organizes characters as more-or-less contemporary. The smooth readability of *Scoop* rests, it might be argued, in its consistent mapping of the stock types of miniseries melodrama onto recognizable geographical and historical points of

origin. As characters shift their personal loyalties from parent or spouse to journalism as a moral project, these gestures of self-assertion are intended to signal their commitment to a project of collective modernization.

It is a commonplace to note that Québecois cinema and television evoke a more coherently imagined national community than those of English Canada. Nevertheless, the extent to which this is manifest in the presuppositional structure of a program like *Scoop* — rather than simply thematically — has received less attention. While the plotlines of *Scoop* often replicate real-world news events which occurred elsewhere (such as the locker-room harassment of a female sports reporter) or which form part of a generalized urban condition (homelessness, for example), the lines of connection and association which lead from these phenomena to a nationally-specific power structure and political geography are effortlessly travelled and quickly conveyed. What initially circumscribes the reporter



and the homeless person within a coherent social space is the sense of ethical responsibility which the latter invokes within the former, but the typical trajectory of *Scoop*'s plotlines is one which inevitably links such problems to a more longstanding and familiar set of political relations. Indeed, as *Scoop* unfolds, the cumulative evidence of social heterogeneity has accompanied the mapping of an increasingly complex conspiracy linking virtually all centres of political and economic power and threatening to divide families. In elaborating this web of interconnections, *Scoop* is clearly setting in place the precondition of its own narrative resolution, the unmasking of secret causalities. At the same time, it may be argued, it is enacting an operation of narrative containment, re-cohering disparate and contemporary urban "problems" within the familiar geometry of an (extended) family romance.

YOUNG MR. DRAPEAU

The largest city in Canada, and the second largest French-speaking city in the world, Montreal is the most two-faced community on the North American continent. During the day, it shows the tourist a facade of puritanical virtue. It is dotted with famous churches, parks and imposing buildings. At night, it becomes the happiest hunting ground in the hemisphere for prostitutes, gambling czars, racketeers, fixers and strong-arm men.

The estimated annual take from all forms of vice has reached the staggering figure of \$100,000,000.

— Martin Abramson, "Montreal Confidential," *Photo Magazine* (1953), p. 14.

Our television writers have carved up the 20th century lengthwise and sideways, giving us the Great Man approach one minute, the Little People's view of things the next. After *Les filles de Caleb*, *Desjardins*, *Cormoran*, *Le temps d'une paix*, *Duplessis*, *La petite patrie* and *Séraphin* — and others which I've no doubt forgotten — now there's *Montréal, ville ouverte* or Quebec's hesitant move into modernity.

— Hugo Léger, *Le Devoir*, February 15, 1992

The other major Québécois téléroman of the 1992 winter season is the TVA network's *Montréal, ville ouverte*, a 13-part series recounting the rise of a municipal reform movement in Montreal during the 1940s and early 1950s. Both *Scoop* and

Montréal, ville ouverte were launched with widespread press coverage and high-profile forms of corporate sponsorship, but the differences of scale and achievement between them are considerable. *Scoop* is shot on film, employs a good deal of location shooting, and is organized around the ascendant appeal of its principal co-stars, Roy Dupuis and Macha Grenon. *Montréal, ville ouverte* was shot on video, and its lazy attention to period detail and minimal, draped sets invite comparisons with a Monogram B-film of the 1940s. The series required, according to the press release which accompanied its debut, 771 distinct performer roles, and these are dispersed across a large number of parallel narratives whose equilibrium and interconnection are often clumsily managed. While the nominal heroes of *Montréal, ville ouverte* — municipal reformers Pacifique (Pax) Plante and Jean Drapeau — are uncharismatic and often peripheral to the events of any given episode, the series' secondary roles offer a succession of cameos by well-established Québécois actors (such as Dominique Michel or Jean Lapointe).

The minor controversies which have turned around *Montréal, ville ouverte* since it began have further served to distinguish it from the more scrupulously credible *Scoop*. One of these centred on its version of the role played by the newspaper *Le Devoir* in the partisan politics of the period, setting the author of the series against surviving relatives and colleagues of Georges Pelletier, *Le Devoir*'s editor in the early 1940s.³ Shortly thereafter, a columnist in the English-language daily *The Gazette* took both series to task for the regularity with which villains within them spoke English, noting that *Scoop* at least undertook to present members of minorities in "non-comic, non-stereotyped, sympathetic roles."⁴ The principle target in this case was the writer of *Montréal, ville ouverte*, Lise Payette, identified here (and invariably within the English-language press) as a "former Parti Québécois cabinet minister and narrator of the 1989 anti-immigration television documentary *Disparaître*."

In its treatment of ethnic and linguistic difference, *Montréal, ville ouverte* leaves little doubt as to where its lines of demarcation are drawn, and a reading which implicates it within contemporary polemics over cultural identity is hardly far-fetched. Nevertheless, a reconstruction of post-war Montreal which links political chaos to rampant criminality and both of these to ethnic diversity has been central to the cultural imaginaries of both Anglophone and Francophone communities within Quebec for several decades. For the first of these, it has served within the elaboration of a lost Montreal as Runyonesque carnival, whose big-city colour and street-corner eccentricity are seen to have faded by the 1960s, victims of the city's francisation and Quebec's ascendant nationalism. This vision of Montreal, which took shape within dozens of popular novels and photojournalistic features during the 1950s, has persisted in English-Canadian mythemes which cast Montreal as disco capital or gangster playground.

2. Carol L. Bernstein, *The Celebration of Scandal: Toward the Sublime in Victorian Urban Fiction* (Pennsylvania State University Press 1991), p. 47.

3. See, for example, Lise Payette's response to a series of letters to the editor of *Le Devoir*, "Lise Payette défend la véracité documentaire de 'Montréal, ville ouverte,'" *Le Devoir*, February 28, 1992, p. B8.

4. Don MacPherson, "Language of Vice: Why do the bad guys speak only English on Quebec TV?" *The Gazette*, March 28, 1992, p. B3.

An attachment to this prelapsarian Montreal undoubtedly masks, at one level, the nostalgia for Anglophone supremacy of which it is commonly accused. At the same time, it should be noted, the imagined city it has reconstituted is one whose values are defined in explicit opposition to those of a Scottish protestant elite or Torontonion puritanism. As the section to follow will suggest, the lost Montreal of Anglophone imagination is one in which the thematics of an ooh-la-la Frenchness are deployed within the generic forms of urban exposé, forms prominent within the U.S. popular culture of the 1950s.

If, as Hugo Léger has suggested, *Montréal, ville ouverte* traces the entry of Quebec into modernity, it does so principally by painting Montreal's "open-ness" during the 1940s as the sign of an underdeveloped collective purpose. It is essential to this reading that continuity be established between the anti-conscription campaigns of war-time and the post-war project of municipal reform. These themes converge in the images of Anglophone soldiers filling Montreal's brothels during the Second World War. *Montréal, ville ouverte* seems torn between a biologicistic reading of the city during this period, which would cast it — in the manner of contemporary accounts of U.S. cities — as a rotting social body, and an alternate, militaristic reading in which a people anxious to reclaim their city are set against invading and occupying forces (Italian gangsters and soldiers on furlough). In either case, the solutions proposed are likely to take the form of hygienic metaphors — most notably, that of "cleaning up" — common within the literature of urban exposé.

The historical figure in whom continuity between different political struggles is embodied, in *Montréal, ville ouverte*, is Jean Drapeau. Drapeau began his political career as a candidate for the anti-conscription forces and served, with Pax Plante, to bring about a judicial inquiry into municipal corruption (the Caron Commission, whose report was published in 1954). One of the idiosyncratic features of *Montréal, ville ouverte* is its tracing of Drapeau's early life within the generic conventions of the Hollywood biography, from youthful musings on life's purpose through to early political acts offering glimpses of embryonic greatness and resolve. Indeed — and to invoke an analogy which is little more than frivolous — *Montréal, ville ouverte* follows the contours of *Young Mr. Lincoln* (John Ford, 1939) in offering a hero whose tentative initiation into politics is followed by a period in which these ambitions are suppressed, and whose judicial battles for a common good are preparatory for a later political triumph which is now deserved. *Montréal, ville ouverte* has installed Drapeau's election to the mayoralty in 1954 as the anticipated moment of its narrative culmination, but its inability to invest this moment with the force of historical necessity lingers over it as a failing which invites diagnosis.

Montréal, ville ouverte is striking for its lack of narrative drive. At one level this simply evidences the temptation to linger on an eroticized image of post-war Montreal rather than moving on to the courtroom sequences which will dominate its latter episodes. More importantly, it might be argued, this quality is rooted in a contemporary ambivalence surrounding Drapeau's ascendancy and the subsequent reform of municipal politics. The familiar narrative of Montreal's

modernization — which leads from the 1954 election through Expo 67, the building of the métro and the 1976 Olympics — has clearly withered over the past two decades as an object of collective commitment whose beginnings might be cast in heroic terms. At the same time, the city's economic decline has led it to be valorized in terms which emphasize its continuities with the "open city" of the immediate post-war period, rather than suppressing these. Amidst this decline, the city has been newly recarnivalized within a range of Francophone works — from the novels of Michel Tremblay to the films of André Forcier — which relocate Runyonesque social chaos from an ethnically diverse downtown to an impoverished, Francophone east end. From the vantage point of 1992, the puritanical figure of Drapeau and sanitizing quality of the push for municipal reform seem insufficiently compelling to sustain *Montréal, ville ouverte's* narrative project.

LOW DOWNS ON BIG TOWNS

"You can't mean Montreal — not the Paris of North America?" she grinned.

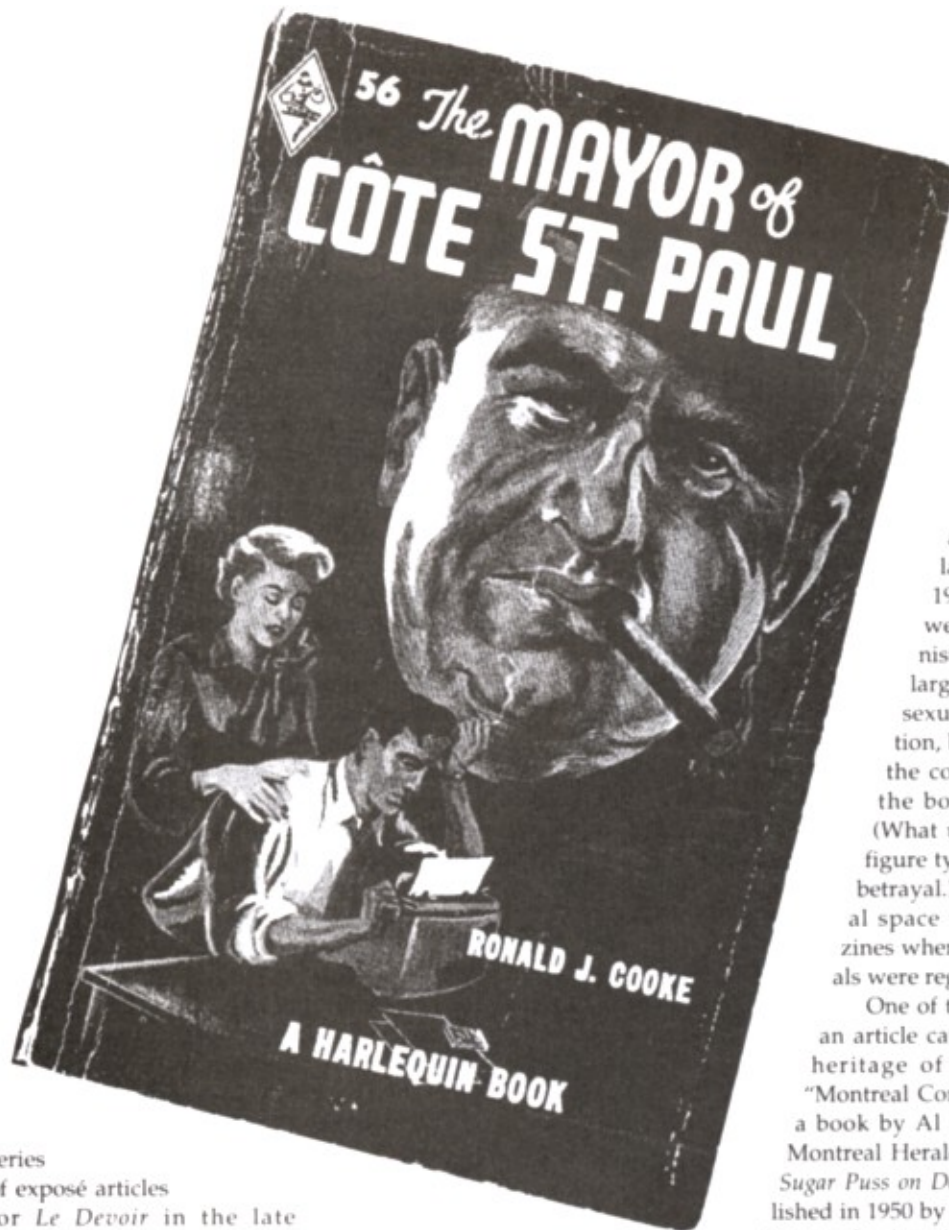
"It makes me puke," I said savagely. "Look at it. An illuminated cross stuck up on the mountain, street after street full of the reverend clergy, a self-congratulatory city council, pious editorials in all the newspapers, and as much vice and aberration and corruption as any city this side of Port Said. One level stinking and the other level smirking, and in between a layer of supposed public servants trying to stuff their greasy pockets with graft. Oh, sure, we have a vice probe every decade or so. It goes on and on, year after year, and then finally it peters out under the sheer dead weight of its own evasive evidence. A few honest officials are disgraced, a few more get eased gently out of their jobs, a couple of writs for slander are issued and settled out of court, and everyone sighs with relief and goes right back to smirking abnormal. Gah! It makes my gorge jump. And to think that not so long ago this used to be a country of clear eyed pioneers."

— Martin Brett, *Hot Freeze* (A New Red Badge Mystery), 1954, p. 108.

Leaving her bitter-sweet memories she travels west, past Guy Street and slowly wends her way past Victorian mansions now reeking of shabby gentility until she reaches Atwater. Once west of the city limits she loses herself in middle-class squalor. This is Dorchester. For this Gisele Lepine traded the cool cleanliness of a Laurentian village.

— Al Palmer, *Sugar Puss on Dorchester Street*, 1950, p. 8.

In its title and iconography, *Montréal, ville ouverte* self-consciously evokes the literature and cinema of urban exposé which flourished during the late 1940s and 1950s within North America. Pax Plante, a lawyer whose experience of municipal corruption as a city employee led him to write a



series of exposé articles for *Le Devoir* in the late 1940s,⁵ fills the role of crusading reformer which is almost a generic requirement of this form. (Following the hearings of the Caron Commission's hearings, in which he was central, Plante moved to self-exile in Mexico, apparently fearing retaliation). What distinguishes the discourse of 1950s municipal exposé from earlier traditions of reformist muckraking is the former's casting of urban crime and corruption in terms which set the backward city against an enlightened national state and judicial system. In the United States, the Kefauver hearings into organized crime (1950-51) served to initiate a series of low-budget films which, throughout the 1950s, succeeded in the redefinition of municipal illegality as a challenge to national integrity and security. These films — *The Enforcer* (1950), *Chicago Confidential* (1957), *The Captive City* (1952), *The Phoenix City Story* (1955), *Kansas City Confidential* (1952), and several others — invited a national, judgemental gaze onto a diseased municipal body.

Films such as these were marked by a predictable duplicity whose traces persist in *Montréal, ville ouverte*. In their cataloguing of urban vice and criminality, they made these the basis of their own lurid stylization. The beginnings of

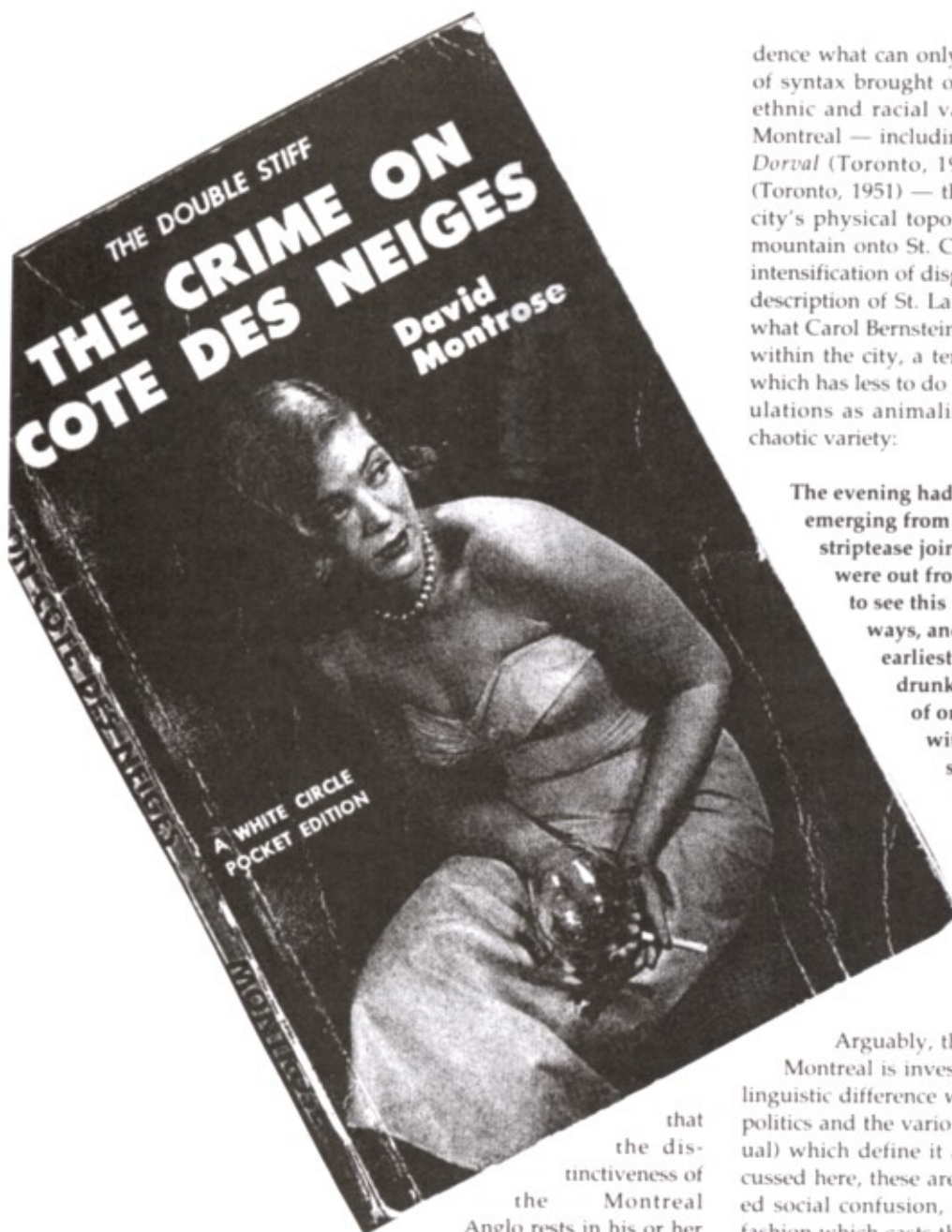
these films are invariably marked by the punctual transition from a documentary framing sequence into an interior set, such as a bar, in which baroque images of chaotic promiscuity (frequently involving interracial mixing) were prominent. The significant influence here is no longer a reformist journalism or judicial investigation, but the city "Confidential" books of Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, which sold in large numbers throughout the late 1940s and 1950s.⁶ Lait and Mortimer were conservative, syndicated columnists for whom the topography of the large U.S. city was one of uncontrolled sexual deviance and racial miscegenation, both of which were seen to nourish the communistic sympathies which are the books' underlying preoccupation. (What united all three, in a condensatory figure typical of the period, is the notion of betrayal.) These books shared an intertextual space with male-oriented photo magazines wherein city exposé articles and pictorials were regularly featured.

One of these magazines, in 1953, published an article cataloguing Montreal's "400-year-old heritage of sin."⁷ The title of this article, "Montreal Confidential," had earlier been that of a book by Al Palmer, a former reporter for the *Montreal Herald* and author, as well, of the novel *Sugar Puss on Dorchester Street*. In both books, published in 1950 by the News Stand Library of Toronto, Montreal is imagined in a manner which evokes both the New York of Damon Runyon and a fin-de-siècle Paris. *Montreal Confidential* was obviously inspired by the Lait and Mortimer books, and its subtitle, "The Low Down on the Big Town!" had appeared earlier on the cover of *Chicago Confidential*. What distinguishes *Montreal Confidential* from its U.S. models is its transformation of deviance into eccentricity, and its subsumption of political problems specific to Montreal and Quebec within a series of local particularisms. The dominant authorial attitude in *Montreal Confidential* is one which has persisted within the discourse of Anglophone Montrealers:

5. These articles were eventually collected in the volume *Montréal sous le régime de la pègre* (Editions de l'action nationale, 1950). In 1992, to coincide with the broadcasting of *Montréal, ville ouverte*, *Le Devoir* reprinted a number of these articles. See, for example, "Le roi, la reine et la barbote," [1949] *Le Devoir*, February 6, 1992, p. B1, and "Ne touchez pas au gentleman!" [1949], *Le Devoir*, February 20, 1992, p. B8.

6. Among these are *New York Confidential* (Dell, 1949) *Chicago Confidential* (Dell, 1950) and *Washington Confidential* (Dell, 1951). Jack Lait died in 1954; Mortimer continued the series, which concluded with *Women Confidential* in 1960.

7. Martin Abramson, "Montreal Confidential, Photo, Vol. 2, No. 7, July 1953, pp. 12-19.



dence what can only be termed a male hysteria: the collapse of syntax brought on by the encounter with infinite sexual, ethnic and racial variety. In a number of novels based in Montreal — including two by David Montrose, *Murder Over Dorval* (Toronto, 1952) and *The Crime on Cote Des Neiges* (Toronto, 1951) — this sense of collapse is mapped onto the city's physical topography, such that the descent from the mountain onto St. Catherine St. and lower is marked by the intensification of disgust. In his novel *Hot Stuff*, Martin Brett's description of St. Lawrence Boulevard after dark exemplifies what Carol Bernstein has described as the finding of "nature" within the city, a tendency towards zoological enumeration which has less to do with the naturalistic vision of urban populations as animalistic than with the recognition of their chaotic variety:

The evening had begun to crawl. The night birds were emerging from their little nests. The movie-cum-striptease joints had their lights on, and the barkers were out front hollering that we were all just in time to see this week's extrah-speshul show. In the doorways, and peering from the pinball saloons, the earliest birds were gathered: the straight drunks; the alcoholics trying to bum the price of one, the fags hoping for something quick with the guys coming home from work; the super-annuated whores hoping for something at any speed with anyone who had fifty cents; the pencil-mustached pimps in fedoras, casting the crowd for guys who looked like they had five dollars, because flashy head-gear costs money and a feller never knows when he might need another hat. (*Hot Freeze*, p. 102)

Arguably, the textual labour of many fictions set in Montreal is invested in fixing a relationship between the linguistic difference which is a principal subtext of that city's politics and the various diversities (linguistic, ethnic and sexual) which define it as urban. In the popular literature discussed here, these are either collapsed into an undifferentiated social confusion, or ordered (as in Palmer's books) in a fashion which casts the Anglophone as intermediary between a Francophone province and ethnically varied inner city. In *Scoop*, the managing of this relationship is accomplished, in part, through a consistent separation of distinct narrative levels — between the glossy melodramas of power which unfold within a unilingual elite and those encounters with a metropolitan *real* which sustain the moral fortitude of its central characters. The difficulty confronting *Montréal, ville ouverte* is that of evoking the historical necessity of municipal reform for an audience which is unlikely to react with moralistic horror to images of prostitution and gambling. The implicit displacement of targets within the series, from vice itself to the political disenfranchisement of the Francophone population, has come at the price of its narrative coherence, but it has made *Montréal, ville ouverte* a revealing and symptomatic object for analysis.

that the distinctiveness of the Montreal Anglo rests in his or her ability to negotiate the linguistic and political complexities of the city and province with a subtlety beyond the grasp of those from elsewhere (and, in particular, Toronto). This particular form of self-valorization — casting the Anglophone Montrealer as proprietary insider and intermediary — recurs in Palmer's novel, *Sugar Puss on Dorchester Street*, wherein a naïve young Francophone woman from the Laurentians enters into sexual maturity and night-club society as a result of her contact with an Anglophone criminal underworld.

Palmer's books are relatively free of the delirious passages with which those of Lait and Mortimer are saturated, and which are prominent in a number of crime thrillers set in Montreal during the 1950s. These passages, whose purest examples may be found in the novels of Mickey Spillane, evi-

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Women and Political Documentary in Quebec

AN INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE BISSONNETTE



Sophie Bissonnette (left)
with Léa Roback

by Barbara Evans and Scott Forsyth

Sophie Bissonnette is one of the most important political documentary filmmakers in Quebec and Canada. Her previous feature films — *A Wives' Tale*, *The Electronic Sweatshop*, *L'amour à quel prix* — all portray the lives and struggles of working women. They confront issues crucial to the agenda of contemporary social change: women and men on strike, the feminization of poverty, oppressive new workplace technologies and feminist and trade union organization through the years. Bissonnette's new film, *A Vision in the Darkness*, is both a panoramic journey through a half-century of change and struggle for women in Quebec and a moving chronicle of the life of Jewish Quebecker Léa Roback and her decades of Communist, unionist and feminist activism.

BE: *How did you come to choose film as the forum for expressing your political ideas?*

Sophie Bissonnette: When I started at university, I was studying sociology and getting very bored with my courses, and at the same time getting very involved with the women's movement. In my second year I took a course called Film and Society, which was supposed to be credited as a sociology course, and I discovered film. Basically it was like a love affair; it was like falling in love with film and watching a lot of films. I really can't

say like other people that when I was little I went to a lot of movies. Not at all. In fact my first experience going to the movies that my mother tells was that we went to see was *Snow White*. We didn't even have a television at home when I was little and so I wasn't used to going to a movie theatre and the usherette came to throw us out because every time *Snow White* went to eat the apple I'd be yelling, "Don't eat it, don't eat it, don't eat it!" (LAUGHS) So I never saw the end of *Snow White*. We were thrown out of the theatre because I was creating havoc.

BE: *Feminist solidarity, even then.* (LAUGHTER)

Bissonnette: So it was like a real discovery. I was also very involved in doing militant work outside the university setting and over the years film became for me the way to bring together those two interests, to use film to pursue the same kinds of objectives I was pursuing socially and politically, especially with regard to improving women's position. So in that sense I find it a very unique opportunity to make a living doing militant work...

SF: *Could you tell us what it's like to be a political documentary filmmaker now, what kind of difficulties and pressures you go through to maintain your commitment?*

Bissonnette: Documentary in Quebec always has had a political context. It grew out of the Quiet Revolution, of the need to give Quebecois a voice, to express their own voice, and it's been pursued over the years in that tradition. Other kinds of traditions have also emerged, but that tradition is still prevalent, but as I was saying it's not as prevalent or easily accepted as it was ... The thing that strikes me is that it doesn't seem to be getting easier over the years, even though I have more films behind me — *A Vision in the Darkness* is my fourth feature documentary. I think documentary in general is becoming a very marginalized form of filmmaking. And it's particularly sad to see that in Quebec, because when I made my first film at the end of the seventies, in Quebec, documentary was just as well considered a genre as fiction film and there wasn't such a strong hierarchy. I'm thinking of filmmakers like Gilles Carles or Denys Arcand moving often from one to the other without feeling that when they were making a documentary it was a minor film in their personal artistic development. But it's astounding — and I'm not very old — that in the twelve years that I've made films in Quebec, how documentary has become a very marginalized form of filmmaking and looked down upon by the film industry itself. And that's in spite of the fact that the public is still as eager as ever to actually see documentary. I think what's very tragic is that documentary is now being associated with what you see on *The Journal*, television reportage pieces, and we very rarely on television or on the big screen have access to in-depth, analytical documentary works as opposed to reportage. And specifically within the documentary genre a type of documentary that I feel very indebted to, and I certainly feel influenced me a lot, was *cinéma direct*, which was the tradition in Quebec of filmmakers from the NFB on the French side going out and discovering Quebec society through a camera and wanting to share it with their fellow and sister Quebecers, connecting with reality and making an analysis of that reality and bringing it forth on the screen. And that type of filmmaking is being replaced by very constrained, scripted types of documentaries that becomes in a way a form of censorship,

because there's no longer that freedom that is so important between the characters that you're filming and the subject that you're filming and the filmmaker. For instance, some documentary filmmakers, to get their projects accepted, feel obliged to script them out, to the extreme where I've seen documentary scripts with dialogues of what the characters are going to say. And this whole trend of very scripted documentaries, more *mise-en-scène*, is much more manageable and convenient for investors or for television broadcasters who generally are involved in the financing, because what the film is going to be about and what is being said can be controlled, which, of course, is very unsettling with regards to direct cinema or that type of approach in documentary because you can give no guarantee of what is going to be up there on the screen in terms of content ... It's not just pre-scripting but the limitations on the number of days on a shoot, the amount of footage shot etc. Those financial considerations place huge constraints on the film. To me, the vital element of documentary is risk, and at the moment, it's very hard to take risks.

And I find another constraint is that there are fewer and fewer technicians, documentary technicians, who will get themselves fully involved with the film. There are fewer and fewer, for instance, camera people who can shoot in the direct cinema tradition, because there's not many of those films being made any more, with that kind of involvement with the characters, spending time, and so on. There's fewer of those films getting made, and so the younger people aren't going into that specific branch because they can't make a living doing it, or not a very good living. And I think it's becoming a factor in also changing the documentaries that do get made, because when you're shooting a documentary, you are very dependent on working together with the crew. You have to be working as a team, and I'm realizing that when I start imagining who I'll be working with in the future I'm counting them on one hand. And I don't see young people going into that. Again, I'm not as familiar with video...

SF: *There's a great moment in A Vision in the Darkness when Léa is visiting her 95-year-old neighbour who turns to the crew, turns to all of you and thanks you all and gets up with some difficulty and shows you out with great grace. It's a great moment for her, but it's a great moment for the process you talk about. You're there as a team, and it's process specific, but not in the arid intellectual way that so much film theory seems to demand. And it was very funny.*

Bissonnette: That's a very good example of what I was saying previously. That was not planned at all, that sequence, because she had told us didn't want us to go there, and at the last moment she decided that we could. So we had absolutely no lighting, we just walked in there with the camera and the sound, the Nagra, and just shot what was going on, and it's a beautiful sequence; it's an ideal lesson for film students, that it's not always technology that makes a film. It has to have a heart and soul.

As a woman filmmaker it's another form of marginalization also. It's interesting to see that at least in Quebec the documentary tradition has really been upheld by the women filmmakers. Whereas the grassroots nationalist movement and other social movements in Quebec have lost momentum

in the last few years, the women's movement has stayed a very strong social movement and women still feel there is a lot that needs to be said... And I'm sure it's not unconnected that this marginalization in documentary is fitting in with women going into the genre. And of course as a feminist filmmaker, for sure in these times that creates a marginalization.

SF: You mentioned about traditions that you identify with, that you feel part of. Cinema direct in Quebec is one, and I wonder what other traditions you feel connected to.

Bissonnette: In a sense I really think it is the direct cinema and contact with people that has been the major influence. Of course I started making films when women were beginning to make more feminist films and that has always also influenced me in wanting to give a voice to women and finding ways of doing that. For instance, when you want to do something about history and women, it's very likely you're going to have to do oral history because written history and documents tend to not talk about women's history, so I think the influences on me go outside the film medium itself, but just how feminism grows and that whole influence on my work.

BE: How did you locate the archival materials you used in *A Vision in the Darkness*?

Bissonnette: It's very difficult when you're making a film about women and especially working class women who are invisible in "official history". We couldn't come up with pictures of the "roaring twenties" for example; there were images of middle-class women, none of working-class women. If you're looking for materials around working women's issues and strikes, you often have to go to the U.S. to the headquarters of the international unions, because they were mostly international unions organizing in Canada then. Some of the photographs I got from Cornell University where the archives of the ILGWU (International Ladies Garment Workers Union) are. In that sense, I think oral history has been the historical way to document the living and working of working people because there are so few written documents or photographic documents. There's one interesting thing, though, in Quebec. Because often women were able to read and write and men weren't, there's a number of personal diaries and letters where part of the history can be found, so part of unofficial history comes through that. But other examples I can think of: Léa spoke to me a lot about the plight of single mothers, and the number of abortions that were performed during those years. And that's something that's very, very hard to document outside of oral history, outside of women talking. There were instances of single mothers who gave up children, and those women do not want to talk about it, because women did not want to reveal that they had had a child out of wedlock, especially in a little town. And so you have to take all of these factors into consideration and piece them together to get a history.

BE: Something that really interests me as well is how you see the future of political filmmaking with the whole collapse of the Eastern bloc and the very successful attempt to make left politics seem to the general public as *passé*. How do you see this affecting socialist feminist film practice?

Bissonnette: I find it hard to answer in the sense that I think when I'm into the daily making of the films I rarely take the time to look at how I situate what I do. In a way I leave that

to the critics or to the public. It's easier for me to look at what motivates each film. In a way I can't afford the time to look at the general picture.

SF: In a sense the film *A Vision in the Darkness* is somewhat of an answer to Barbara's question. It is after all about the past in the present and how we have a future and we continue the struggle, despite the reactionary turn of the times. It's a celebration of a communist woman who's quite unabashed about that and loved her life and communicates that spectacularly. So what you do is what you've always done and that's presumably what we'll all have to still do.

Bissonnette: In a way I think it's the work itself that should give the answer to the question. I guess my concern more as a filmmaker is what you do next and how, considering that the context is becoming more restricted and constrained to make documentaries and specifically political documentaries. So you look at it from one project to the next, and struggle daily to ensure you can keep making the films you want to make. I've certainly felt over the last 12 years and over my different films that because I always take into account the public that's going to see the film, and because of the amount of time I spend doing the research generally, meeting a lot of women who eventually could be in the film, I get a good sense also of the public I'm trying to reach. For instance doing the film with Léa I was meeting a lot of women who were the same generation who were garment workers or textile workers and I had them in mind when I was making the film. So the research becomes very significant in terms of giving myself an image of who that public is. And for sure it was a concern when I was making the film. For instance, the women from the senior citizens' club when they would find out they were in a film with a communist. I have to admit I did not mention to them that the main character of the film was a communist because of all the sorts of fears that still exist about the word. And I was very pleased at the end of the film that they thought she was a wonderful character and it didn't matter in the least that she was a communist or whatever "ism" she could have been, they just found her a lovable character. And I was so glad, because that was a trial screening and if it went over with them...! Over the last ten years, I've found that, yes, the way I talk to the general public has changed. If I think about *A Wives' Tale*, which was a much more militant type of film, it was also at a time when that was more "acceptable," when there was a larger audience for that type of film. And I always do take into account who I'm talking to. The translation has to be different, because the context has changed. But so far I don't feel it's changed what I have to say, except that, of course, I'm part of that context and my own ideas also evolve with historical times, so I'm moving with the ideas and I take the public into account which gives a different shape to each project.

SF: Is there a sense across your films that there's a certain set of messages that you want to address?

Bissonnette: I think for me the single motivation throughout all those films is giving a voice to women and it becomes part of my motivation, because each film is a discovery for me. It's like travelling; it's a personal discovery for me in terms of history, in terms of struggles, in terms of different experiences. And so I'm giving a voice to that experience and trying to be

respectful and sensitive to that experience. Because there always is that power relationship between the filmmaker and the characters you're filming, and I always try to set things very clear and very straight with the characters as to what my intentions are. They always see the film before it is finalized and have to give their okay that they agree with how they're being presented and the context in which they're in. I always try to take those factors into account. I guess people who agree to be in the film find their own reasons. It's like an exchange. It's like they help me make my film and in exchange they also get something out of it personally, like getting their cause across or getting their story across which gives them social or personal gratification. It's very important to be aware of that relationship; it's really crucial, because it's that relationship that gets printed on film. That's why I've actually never been able to film with people I didn't like. For instance, I've seen films like *Controlling Interest* or documentaries like that, where they go out and interview businessmen of top corporations... But then I'm just personally incapable of making those films because I have to make films with people I really like, because that relationship to me is what motivates me and what I want to put on film.

SF: *The politics of the process and the articulation around voice, comes through in the films. Are you conscious of the finished project being changed because of the way you make it?*

Bissonnette: It's being shaped constantly by that relationship. When I start out a project I have a general conception. I start out with a hypothesis and an analysis of the specific situation which I'll go and cover, let's say the feminization of poverty, or new technologies or the history of Quebec. And then as I do the research and meet the characters this changes. I'm constantly forced to change the hypothesis and the concept with which I started, because it doesn't work out with what reality is saying. For instance in the film with Léa Roback most of what's written about the second world war was about women at last going into the work force and finally getting a chance to work specifically in non-traditional work. And I realized doing the research that women had been working before the forties and that though there was an increase of women entering the labour force it wasn't a new phenomenon as has often been portrayed. So the forties didn't become a turning point in the film in terms of women's experience of work. It was like women worked and then the forties happened and it changed some of their experiences of work. They worked in different industries, got somewhat better paid, but few actually did non-traditional work. Most had pretty boring work. And that seemed to be the consensus. I'd read a lot about constraints on everyday life during the forties. There was a lot of government propaganda about recuperating soap, etc., but all the working class women I met in Quebec were very little affected in their daily life by changes that the war brought about. So as you do your research, you have to change your idea. And that goes on throughout the shooting also. What you had imagined during the research, when you're shooting you discover something else, because people only give you on film what they want to give you, and often stories are not the same at all when you know there's a general public that's going to hear them, so characters take a different angle on a story that you hadn't predicted, and

again it brings another perspective on a story that you hadn't anticipated. I find that the whole editing process often questions your own conceptions. I've often found that if you're trying to edit a sequence and you're having a lot of problems trying to piece it together, it's often because you're trying to have the character say something that's not really what they're saying, and again you have to change your perspective, that that's not really how they perceived what happened, that's not really what was going on; their point of view is different than the one that you thought you wanted to portray. For instance the meeting between Léa and the garment worker who was a militant organizer was one of the sequences we had the hardest time with because I was trying to edit the sequence in terms of the events and the chronology of the strike and winning the strike and so on, when in fact what brought the two women together was the fact that they had had so much fun during that strike! They got arrested by the police and they just cracked up laughing about it, and suddenly the strike was about how that was a very, very special, fun experience for them to go out on the streets and challenge the church, challenge the manufacturers and challenge their husbands. It challenged my whole notion of how to talk about strikes, and so the sequence became much more about rude jokes, about pinching bottoms and getting arrested and laughing about it, which conveyed a different sense of five thousand women coming together. And we're not used to hearing women talk that way, about strikes, about crude jokes, about getting arrested, and wasn't that great! It's something we tend to think men would do.

SF: *What about the difficulty of distribution in these times?*

Bissonnette: I've always found that's the crunch, the hardest part with documentary filmmaking and maybe with filmmaking in general, although I don't want to speak for other people. When your motivation is not only the making of the film, and the enjoyment of the filmmaking process, it's painful to see how little money goes into distribution. And it's so very difficult to find a broadcaster for a documentary. Plus, if you don't have a television presale, you're excluded from applying to Telefilm, and you're almost excluded from SOGIC (Société générale des industries culturelles - Québec). Then these institutions can say well, nobody's interested. But at the same time they're starving the distributors and the broadcasters present almost no documentaries. In Quebec it's no longer a strong tradition to work with community groups; there's not enough money and energy to do that kind of educational work. So you have to attack it on all these fronts, the financing in order to make it, and distribution to the public, to groups.

BE: *I wonder if you could expand on the notion that you believe there is a desire for political films, films that really deal with our political and social history.*

Bissonnette: That's what's so shocking about the way television or the financing cultural institutions treat documentary and political documentary films, especially. There's a crying need out there for those kinds of films. At the screenings I've gone to, it's amazing the response from all generations. And people complain that they don't get a chance to see those kinds of films. So I support the position that there's a real demand for in-depth coverage of issues and that people want

controversial films, unlike what television tells, that we have to be "objective". But the fact is that the public basically finds those "objective" films boring.

SF: Commercial fiction is very high profile in Quebec. You have Arcand as the prototype of the documentary filmmaker who renounced his past, for example.

Bissonnette: But again, when we had the *Rendezvous du Cinéma Québécois*, where they show all the films made in Quebec in a given year, everybody agreed, this year, that the documentary films were the best compared to the fiction films which were really poor. But then also we got told by some people that documentary films were really ugly because the criteria being applied were those for fiction films. It's frustrating when there's no recognition of the aesthetics of documentary. Documentary has its own aesthetic.

SF: Have you thought of making fiction films?

Bissonnette: My motivation for film comes from reality. It's the raw material I need to create, and without that material I don't feel capable of sitting down in front of a blank sheet of paper and imagining. Because I've always been so astounded by what happens in documentary filmmaking, the way it suddenly all comes together and things go beyond fiction. It's like nothing you could ever have imagined, that anyone could have imagined. And it's those moments in documentary filmmaking that keep you going. For instance, in that sequence with Léa in the theatre when she's watching the Brecht-Dudov film, *Kuhle Wampe*, all it brings out in her in terms of the emotion and memories of the 1930s ... in Germany ... Even the film, *L'amour à quel prix?*, which, when it came out as a film ended up being three interviews, brings out an incredible response in women's groups, where it's shown. It's a very hard film; it's about women who are dependent emotionally and financially in the context of the feminization of poverty, and it's not very easy for anyone in the public to deal with. But people tell me that they've gone home after the screening and talked with their husbands, that the film has really gone out and reached something very deep in them. I don't think films change the world but they can make a slight contribution to help people get a better understanding of who they are of the society they live in, to increase their self-respect and so on. That film has very deep, profound implications for people who see it. In fact, some women reject the film, because it's very hard to look at that in yourself. But how do you measure the success of a film? There can be hundreds of films about women being emotionally dependent — and there are. But how many of them have women forgotten about, just watched on television? This is a film that's more demanding and more rewarding ... I think what is becoming more and more a thread throughout my films is that there's always the political and the personal. The film with Léa is a personal trajectory, but it also informs us about the development of history. *L'amour à quel prix* again was a lot like that, also. It was, love at what cost? Love and money and the personal politics. I think that certainly runs throughout my films and what makes them to me, feminist films, trying to deal with those issues and bring them together, which we don't find much in men's films. I'm part of the feminist tradition of trying to bring those two issues together.

SF: You mentioned you were taking *A Vision in the Darkness* to Paris, and I was thinking that while it's very specifically about

Quebec, a film something like that could be made practically anywhere in North America where the working class is organized. Were you thinking of audiences in Quebec or North America as a whole?

Bissonnette: The public I had in mind was a general public in Quebec, and that's another hard constraint. We're supposed to make films which are good for export, but if we're not going to make the films about ourselves, who is? Most often, the Canadian or Quebec films that work best abroad are often the ones that didn't make any attempt to be international.

SF: This film is a history of the twentieth century, and a history of trade unionism and a history of women. Did you get daunted by the enormity of the project?

Bissonnette: Oh, yes. It was enormous. It was a very real challenge to try to tell this story in 90 minutes, and if it works it's because Léa is very, very unique. Her politics are so integrated into her personal life ... In that sense it was never, "This is me, this is my home life, these are my politics". The same values prevail in every part of her life. She's made choices at times in her life to spend two years taking care of the children of her brother, and she felt that this was as important a thing to do as organizing in a factory. Her concern for her fellow and sister human beings envelops all her activities. So she has that ability to turn very personal issues into the political, from the past to the present, within one sentence.

SF: Are there any particular filmmakers or documentary filmmakers that you look to for influence or inspiration for your films? For example, *A Vision in the Darkness* bears a lot of similarity to a lot of American films of the last ten or so years, like *Union Maids* or *Rosie the Riveter* or *Seeing Red*.

Bissonnette: Yes, but also I'm thinking of films like ones by Dagmar Teufel Gueissaz, Sylvie Van Brobant or Sylvie Groulx and now by younger people. I'm not alone, and it is a comfort that we're all in the same boat. I think the younger women who are making political films will move more into video for very obvious reasons, that it's not as expensive and access to films is so limited. I think a lot of the interesting political work that's getting done is getting done in video.

SF: Earlier you said you hoped for magic moments, moments "when reality talks". Does a lot of that have to do with your sense of politics of voice and the reverence or love you have for your subjects?

Bissonnette: It is a bit like falling in love, in that you have to be looking out for the other person; you have to be looking out for these moments in order to get them. (LAUGHS) So you have to have some availability, like when you're looking for a partner. You have to be available and listening and out there to be able to catch the moment when it comes. Because if you're not available for it, it won't happen. So it's a give and take on both sides, of things coming together, a coincidence of what reality can bring out, but you need to be ready for it and ready to switch in the middle of a shoot to be able to say, "There's something else going on," on a completely different track from what you had planned that takes you somewhere else. And it may get you nowhere, maybe it won't be in the film in the end, but you have to be willing to take that chance.

A Vision in the Darkness is distributed by Cinéma Libre, 3575 boul Saint Laurent, suite 704, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2X 2T7.

Tel. (514) 849-7888

Fax (514) 849-1231

Sheila McCarthy going through transformation process in Patricia Rozema's *Desperanto*

Cinderella Does Montreal

by Olivia Riochet

Desperanto is Patricia Rozema's contribution to *Montréal Vu Par* (1992), a soon to-be-released film made up of six short films. This Montreal film project is reminiscent of *New York Stories* or more appropriately, *Paris Vu Par*, the 1965 film that took Paris as its subject. Six directors, with four Québécois, Denys Arcand, Michel Brault, Jacques Leduc, and Léa Pool and two Canadians, Atom Egoyan and Patricia Rozema, come together and contribute six short, discrete ruminations on Montreal.

*"Poetry comes from people who don't attempt it. We are woodworkers. The mediums come later and if they so desire, it's their job to make the table speak."*¹ — Jean Cocteau

Desperanto takes as its starting point and subject matter the indelible boundaries of language. The French/English divide offers capacious potential for the humorous, for crossing the lines of propriety. And Rozema milks linguistic misreadings for all their worth. The near-miss and the inappropriate (largely due to language

1. Jean Cocteau, "Propos sur le Cinématographe," *Ramsay Poche*, Cinéma, Paris, 1986.

miscomprehension) lay in wait for protagonist Ann Stewart (played by Sheila McCarthy) at every turn. Language, that all too significant signifier of difference, provides the central trope of *Desperanto*, marking its tension and tone.

Ann Stewart — a dowdy Torontonion — is up for a good time, seeking rejuvenation on a weekend get-away to Montreal. Lounging on her hotel bed, she wistfully watches Denys Arcand's *Decline of the American Empire*. For Ann, the film promises an enticing image of Montreal as a site of pleasure, where language doesn't hesitate to name desire, to define it and underline it. Yet her trip (so far) has hardly approximated such pleasures, linguistic or corporeal. Instead she has experienced nothing of the city's promised pleasures except its touristic facades, its must-see sites; the after-taste is one of boredom, brought on by her inability to communicate in the language of desire — french. On her final night in town Ann is struck how she has missed the "real" Montreal — the romanticized Montreal — of her dreams: she resolves to go out and get the "real" thing. She dons her "loveliest" white dress (a doubly conservative and kitsch number sure to invite rejection) and heads out to find the adventure she seeks.

Ann finds it. She crashes a francophone party where she neither knows nor understands a soul, and desperately proceeds, using inappropriate methods, to be accepted by the "in" crowd. Of course, Ann only manages to elicit their mockery. Our heroine is ostracized even further when a horrifying incident transforms her evening into a nightmare. After a bout of frenetic dancing (duly noted by the guests, of course), Ann sits down to catch her breath, but she doesn't notice that a strawberry lies on her chosen chair. We can imagine the rest.

Menstrual blood is an ultimate taboo in western society, and by extension, our mainstream cinema, with rare exceptions (DePalma's *Carrie* being a case in point), has managed to elude completely. With *Desperanto*, Patricia Rozema takes on this taboo. Although the directness is diffused somewhat by the cinema audience's inside knowledge of the stain's origin, the impact is not nullified. In the eyes of the guests, as well as the unfortunate victim's, the effect of the transgression is sorely felt — the shame is almost unbearable. The stigmatized heroine is confronted with the kind of situation that only an exceptionally verbally gifted and socially adroit person could handle. Our tongue-tied heroine has but one escape, she closes her eyes, replacing her present reality with a more favourable fantasy.

Paralysed by shame, Ann constructs a daydream (reminiscent of Freud's notion of the *tagtraum*) for herself. This parallel universe temporarily reconciles her with the world and with the codes, which, up until this moment, have eluded her grasp. While she pretends to sleep, her real body remains riveted on the couch; at the same time her fantasmatic body leaves its corporeal envelope where she achieves her goal — glamour, proficiency and acceptance by others. The prissy starched dress becomes a fairytale gown complete with a regal, raised collar. As in *Cinderella* or Jacques Demy's *Donkey Skin*, the moment of metamorphosis offers Ann the supernatural power that she paradoxically needs to achieve success in

the real world. As Marc Vernet similarly suggests: "it is the strength of desire stimulated by superimposition that establishes continuity where there only was difference, in order to undo categories and enjoy combinations, in the pleasure that is given by the imaginary when it is nourished by the symbolic, jumping over the usual distinctions, to work out undreamt of passages and invisible accordances."² In this manner, Ann's daydream offers the world of the possible, where the principle of reality gives over to pleasure. Visually "doubled" (through superimposition), our fairy princess sits on the arm of the couch and picks up a remote control. She observes her inanimate "sleeping" body squeezed in between a concerned french-speaking couple and begins to affect the space around her as if it were a T.V., manipulating the scene according to her own pace and desire; she speeds up, slows down and stops images long enough to consult a handy dictionary for the correct meaning of the illusive french words that swirl about her.

Tired of this game, and inspired by the freedom of invisibility, Ann gracefully floats through the party, offering kisses and smiles to the formerly hostile assembly that can't see her, let alone judge her. At this point subtitles, usually extra-diegetic reality, and the sole concern of the foreign spectator, begin to fall onto the other side of the fourth wall and play a role in the narrative itself. Bilingualism, with all of its attendant problems, is lovingly sent up here. The trope of bilingualism is suggested in the title itself, as *Desperanto* is an obvious play on esperanto, the universal language whose promoters claim its use would dissolve difference and result in a linguistic utopia. Yet Rozema deftly sidesteps the pitfalls of didacticism evident in the confrontation of franco-anglo linguistic conflict. Herein lies the film's innovation. Rozema chooses to make the subtitle, normally the friend of the curious, but non-polyglot cinephile, veer away from its normal purpose. The filmmaker explains: "in my film, subtitles are the missing link which guide the main character towards the others; she is in the same situation as the viewer of the foreign film who reads the subtitles to understand the action. The big difference here is that her relation to subtitles stops being a distant relationship, they materialize and language becomes an object which can be manipulated."

Ann notices English subtitles floating along the bottom of the frame; she tries to read them upside down but with difficulty. So she then moves around to the side of the frame and squeezes her way in between us (the audience) and the subtitles. The words are legible from her position, yet they remain at her feet and appear and disappear much too quickly making comprehension difficult. Ann picks up the phrase "you took the words out of my mouth" but it evaporates into thin air when the next line is spoken. Another phrase, "Oh marvellous" is treated more radically: The "Oh" is discreetly tucked into her cleavage, while the "marvellous" slips into her wine glass where it dissolves before she drinks it. Our radiant heroine now has the ability to "play with words."

In filmic terms, we, on the one hand, witness the formation of a third space that is neither intra- nor extra-diegetic, but overlaps both. The subtitle's function, normally the viewer's domain, is appropriated by a character who slips around to

translation by Suzie Tremblay



Sheila McCarthy, Alexandre Hausvater and Charlotte Laurier
in Patricia Rozema's *Desperanto*

the other side of the fourth wall and deciphers — at the same time as we do — the meaning of other characters' words. On the other hand, the mediation imposed by language is thrown into question: our character's "perceptual passions" (to borrow Christian Metz's term referring to the spectator's desire to see and hear) have not been fulfilled by. In effect, these "senses of distance" (sight and hearing as opposed to the "senses of contact," touch, taste, and smell) have totally isolated our character because of her lack of knowledge of the french language. The resolution of the problem is nevertheless, purely symbolic, thus indicating that the realm of the "as if" — the parathétique situation — might suggest an answer; by eliminating the distance, the character acts "as if" she had direct access to that world. Thus language merely becomes an object, matter in movement, bled of its mediative function as it becomes literally physical, moving through the character's mouth and body.

At the evening's end, thanks to this mysterious and liberating power, the veil of misunderstanding is lifted. Once the clock strikes twelve our Cinderella returns to her material self, back to the pathetic outsider she was at the film's beginning. But nothing is as it was. Two characters come to rescue

her and Ann suddenly recognizes them from her entry into the romanticized Québécois universe — she had seen these faces watching *The Decline of the American Empire*. Actress Genevieve Rioux and director Denys Arcand, playing ambulance attendants, extend their hands, speak her language, and aid in the fruition of her fantasies. In this way, the gap which appeared between the real and the imaginary during Ann's daydream is left open: indeed, only through fiction can reality be reached. As Patricia Rozema corroborates: "there is in my films a dichotomy between painful and unyielding reality and the imaginary; a place of reconciliation where we experience total liberty. In reality, my character has a vague, almost foggy relationship with the world, full of misunderstanding, but all is made clear when she comes into contact — in the literal sense — with words. The imagined brings her nearer the truth that reality has kept hidden." Christian Metz's dictum on the powers of the cinematic apparatus are especially applicable to an understanding of *Desperanto*: "a little desire is reconciled with a little reality thanks to a little magic."³

2. Marc Venet, "Figures de l'Absence," éditions des *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Paris, 1988, p. 86.

3. Christian Metz, *Signifiant Imaginaire*, ed. Christian Bourgeois, p. 166.

Bordwell Considered

COGNITIVISM,
COLONIALISM
AND CANADIAN
CINEMATIC CULTURE

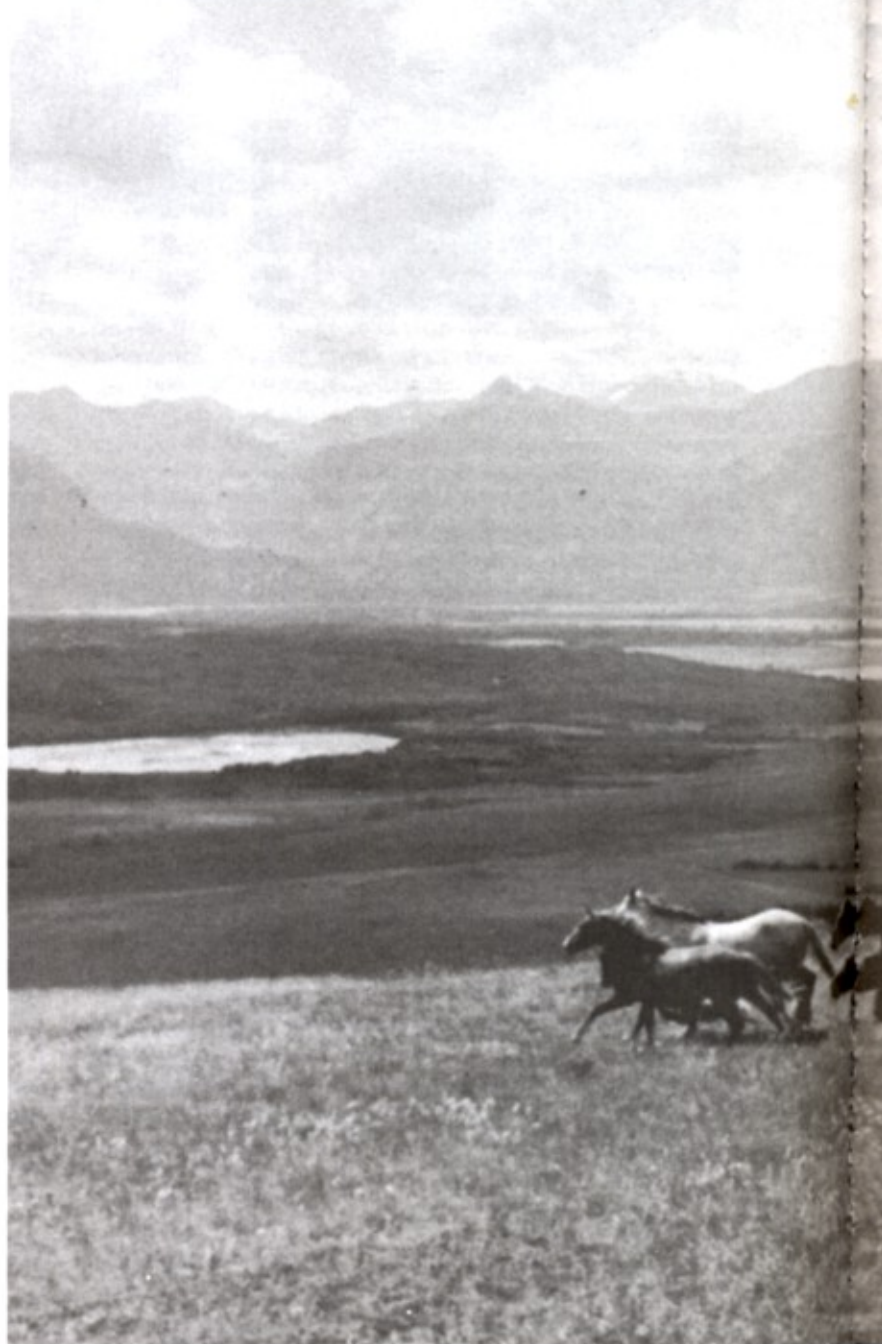
by José Arroyo

Colin Low's *Corral*, 1954

INTRODUCTION

David Bordwell has become a force to contend with in Anglo-American film studies. Robert Ray, in an otherwise damning critique, admits him to be its leading figure (1988: 147). *Film Art: An Introduction* (1979, 1986), which Bordwell co-authored with Kristin Thompson, is according to Bill Nichols, "one of the most widely used introductory texts in the [U.S.A.]" (Nichols 1989: 513n3). The book was reprinted in 1986, a year after the publication of two other major works, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985), co-authored with Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger. It is to the publication of this triple whammy within the space of a year that Bordwell's present eminence can be traced.

Amos Vogel thought *Film Art*, "Perhaps the very first textbook to deal with cinema from an (intelligently) neo-formalist perspective...This is an important book, capably introducing difficult subject in clear, fairly non-specialist prose" (1982: 72). *Narration in the Fiction Film* was heralded as a work that "will undoubtedly ground the discussion for years to come"



(Kozloff 1986: 43). Praise for *Classical Hollywood Cinema* reached a new plateau: "it is going to change the way American film history is studied" (Gunning 1987: 52); "no work in the field will, or should be, ever quite the same" (D.J. Wenden 1986: 113); "destined to become itself a classic in film studies" (Elsaesser 1985: 52); "A landmark in the history of academic film studies in the United States" (Richard Allen 1985: 87).

Such praise from the Anglo-American film establishment is cause enough for our own engagement with Bordwell's work. The adjective "Anglo-American" is telling. It connotes Canada's historical shift from colony of England to colony of the United States even as, by our absence, it indicates our insignificance. Robert Fulford has written that his generation of Canadians grew up believing that, "if we were very good or very smart, or both, we would some day *graduate* from Canada" (cited in Crean 1976: 8). Today film scholars in Canada can bypass it altogether.

As Canadian film scholars, our research agendas are often

set for us. Due to the meagreness of graduate programs in this country (only York offers even a Master's in film studies) many of us are forced to go to the United States or Britain to study. What we often bring back is notions of what are worthy objects of study, what are viable methodologies and what are significant histories that were not designed with Canadian cinematic culture in mind. There are few pressures on film scholars in Canada to familiarize themselves with the pioneering work on Canadian cinema by eminent indigenous scholars like Peter Harcourt, Peter Morris, or Joyce Nelson. But one risks credibility by remaining unaware of the work of 'the leading figure in Anglo-American film studies,' whether the work is well-received here or not.¹

In fact, Bordwell's work has been lauded here as well. Peter Rist thought *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in*

1. My own experience, which I believe is not unique, exemplifies this. The very first course on cinema that I took at McGill used *Film Art* as a text. I did my Masters in England where Bordwell was central to the required component of the curriculum. What I know of Canadian film I had to learn on my own.





Arthur Lipsett's *Very Nice, Very Nice*



the *Interpretation of Cinema* perhaps Bordwell's most significant book since *Film Art* and "yet another landmark for film scholarship" (Rist 1990: 165). While Peter Harcourt wrote approvingly of Bordwell's call to "return to a new empiricism in order to develop a 'historical poetics' of cinema" (Harcourt 1991: 120).

Bordwell is a neo-formalist and the 'major proponent' of cognitivist science (Andrew 1989:1), a psychological model often set explicitly against psychoanalysis, whose adherents include Noel Carroll and Edward Branigan. According to Dudley Andrew, their work has "begun to change the tone of thinking and writing about cinema" (Andrew 1989:1). Here, Peter Harcourt also sees hope for cognitivism,

How influential this new theoretical school may become or what role it may play within the academy in Canada, it is too soon to say. What is encouraging about it, however, is that these fresh theoretical models more readily allow discussion of personal differences within cinema, of national differences, and even of differences of contestational practices — such as that which Canadian experimental film represent. Less totalizing in its ambition, this new theoretical intervention might help to pluralize the discourse about cinema and perhaps even begin to widen the range of films referred to (Harcourt 91:120).

Peter Harcourt is one of the great champions of Canadian film studies. "Canadian Film Studies: A Pedagogic Overview" and Peter Morris' "From Film Club to Academy: The Beginnings of Film Education in Canada," offer fascinating accounts of film education in Canada. These two articles hint at rich histories, marked differences, and striking particularities that I suspected Bordwell's approach would diminish if not elide altogether.

In this article I propose to examine the usefulness of Bordwell's work to Canadian film studies. All his work has Russian Formalism as a methodological foundation to which a cognitivist psychology has been progressively added over the years. I will offer an analysis of Bordwell's application of these two approaches as expositied through a series of articles and *Narration in the Fiction Film*, though I will refer to the rest of his work as occasion warrants. But before I examine how useful this work can be here, I think a contextualization of 'here,' particularly as it pertains to a cinematic culture, is in order.

HERE AT THE MOVIES

Canada is a colony of the United States. Our colonization is unique. As George Grant has written, "we are not in the empire as are the exploited colonies of South America, but rather with the intimacy of a younger brother status" (Grant 1965: ix). However unique, our colonization is nevertheless extensive. Our industry is branch plant and our abundant natural resources are exported for processing. The two pillars of our economy, two strengths, are simultaneously twin liabilities that make us economically dependent. Militarily our

armed forces have been under the direction of the American Permanent Joint Board of Defense since the Ogdensburg Agreement in 1940 (Smythe 1990:18). Politically, Pierre Trudeau estimated that the country has the freedom to make only about 10 per cent of the national decisions (Smythe 1990: 20).

The case of the cinema is one of the most complete colonization. As Manjunath Pendakur details in his aptly named *Canadian Dreams and American Control*, 97 per cent of the screen time in our movie theatres is filled by imported films and 90 per cent of the nearly \$1 billion in annual revenues from film and video are controlled by the U.S. majors (29-30).

We not only see American films almost exclusively but we have a long history of doing so. Canada has been considered part of the American domestic market since the 1920s because exhibition and distribution in Canada have been vertically integrated with American production since then. As long ago as 1925 95 per cent of all films exhibited in Canada were supplied by major U.S. film companies (Pendakur 1990: 59).

This degree of colonization has extended even to the academy. According to Peter Harcourt "Canada must be the only country in the world that does not put its own achievements at the centre of its educational system" (1988: 23). Writing of film studies in particular, Geoff Pevere noted that in an introductory course he taught on cinema (which included such 'difficult' auteurs as Welles, Bergman and Godard), "it was the Canadian section of the course that proved a major stumper to students. Canadian films were the most 'foreign' films" (Pevere, 1988: 333).

I have gone to great, perhaps boring, length to establish that Canada is a colony because this is rarely explicitly acknowledged. According to Michael Dorland, "the originary, naturalistic sense of *Canadian* difference has in the past century been profoundly compromised by the *American* similarity" (Dorland 1988: 319). Part of the uniqueness of Canada's status as a colony derives from the powerful ideology through which reams of evidence as to our colonial status economically, militarily, politically and culturally are discounted, made insignificant rather than denied, by virtue of perceived personal similarities with American citizens.

I suspect that Canadians looking at American films see them both differently and the same as Americans. That is to say we not only know the meaning that Americans are supposed to create, and share it with them, but we can also create a different meaning that may or may not be shared nationally. The process is not just one of making a different meaning but of making meaning differently.

For example, I grew up reading many of the same books, magazines and even newspaper stories as Americans of my generation. I saw the same movies and television programs and I listened to the same music. Most Canadians of my generation would have a frame of reference they could share with Americans of my generation, which is not to say we have the same frame of reference. For whereas my generation of Canadians can talk to my generation of Americans about their country, their society and their culture, we cannot expect them to reciprocate and we know that.

It might not have worried the late Northrop Frye very much "if a roomful of Canadian schoolchildren is asked who

the Prime Minister of Canada is and [they] say Jimmy Carter" (Frye and Fulford 1980: 15). But at some point the children find out. And the resulting dislocation is perhaps why "we are constantly brooding over who we are" (Meisel 1986: 248). Canadians confronted with American movies make a different meaning and make meaning differently because of our knowledge of America and our knowledge that we are not American. This process is in some ways comparable to Mary Ann Doane's notion of 'the Masquerade.' Whereas Doane sees sexual mobility as a distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction (Doane 1982, 1990: 48), I think cultural mobility seems to be a distinguishing feature of colonial subjectivity in its cultural construction. We comprehend as if we were the intended audience but realize we are not directly addressed. We are an absence. According to Doane, "Masquerade...involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation of the missing gap or distance" (48). When watching American films we too have to put on a masquerade, re-align our cultural identity so that that gap, which is the result of being Canadian watching films as if we were Americans, can be bridged. This concept of a national masquerade remains an underdeveloped one. But it is an intriguing idea, far from singular,² and hints at how fruitful the incorporation of feminist theory within any theory of spectatorship, particularly the colonial kind, can be.

To my knowledge, no study about how Canadians see American movies has been done. There are, however, many indications that this question should at least be formulated as one central to the study of film in Canada. Martin Knelman's comment that "the Otherness of culture was something taken for granted by anyone who had grown up in Canada" (Knelman 1977: 5) is a typical one. "One subliminal message was consistent in these experiences," Knelman adds, "Culture wasn't something that came out of the life around you...The movies...put us in touch with another world." These are revealing comments. In terms of films, what Knelman is describing is an ability to comprehend, coupled with a consciousness that the movies were of a world that was not ours and an unconscious message that movies didn't come from our world. It seems to me like enough ammunition to demand a re-thinking of suture and cinematic identification that takes the effect of context into a consideration of the heretofore solely psychoanalytic process.

Demands for national cinemas are also steeped in assumptions that we would see differently, that we would have an immanent relation to our own movies not possible with foreign ones,³ and that these differences make a big difference. Joyce Nelson, for example, writes,

A National cinema, by framing scenes and images of a country, help to establish the boundaries of that nation, to convey a sense of place. The viewer becomes steeped in a familiar, bounded, cinematic "here". The importance of the centredness has been recognized by Margaret Atwood, who writes: A person who is 'here' but rather be somewhere else is an exile or a prisoner; a person who is here but thinks he is somewhere else is insane (Nelson 1988: 72).

From Knelman, Nelson and Atwood one could cull a

Canadian viewer of American films whose very Canadian-ness makes the viewing process one filtered through alienation (its Otherness) and (whether passing through an acknowledgement of here, the madness that accompanies the denial or the exile or prison of a wish for elsewhere) results in a de-centred subject. This description is in fact similar to accounts of colonial subjectivity.

Seamus Deane has written that, "At its most powerful colonialism is a process of radical dispossession." In our case, this dispossession is not so much economic as psychic. "The Canadian film experience," writes Maurice Yacowar, "proves that a whole nation can feel itself a silenced, even invisible, Outsider in its own home" (Yacowar 1986: 13).

Frederic Jameson has argued that colonialism results in a loss of meaning (Jameson 1990). Economic and political decisions are made elsewhere. As a consequence we are unable to grasp the way the system as a whole functions. There is always a piece of the puzzle missing. Jameson is here referring to the loss of meaning experienced by citizens of the metropolis. But the implications for the colonial subject are clear. Jameson notes that "the colonies remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power" (Jameson 1990: 50). As I discussed above, colonial peoples are intimately aware of imperial culture. But this knowledge is often accompanied by ignorance of, and the inability to imagine, their own context⁴ and an additional knowledge that they lack the power to effect change within it. The resultant dispossession is indeed radical.

Alex Callinicos has noted that "postmodernism found some of its most extravagant enthusiasts in Canada" (1989: 1). This is understandable. Like postmodernism, Canada is fragmented, pluralistic, heterogenous, diverse. Some of the effects of living in Canada are also similar to those of postmodernism, namely, as the perennial national questioning of 'where is here?' and 'who are we?' indicate — loss of meaning and decentred subjectivity.

One of the results of postmodernism's questioning of the great Western metanarratives has been a new cultural politics of difference. According to Cornel West,

distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous...; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the

2. For example Meisel asserts that "Inside every Canadian whether she or he knows it or not, there is, in fact, an American. The magnitude and effect of this American presence in us all varies considerably from person to person, but is ubiquitous and inescapable" (1986: 248). I don't quite agree. I think there's a difference between our familiarity and an unconscious misrecognition of ourselves as American. We might not know who we are but we're not necessarily schizophrenic. Nevertheless, Meisel's description is in fact one of duality, of cultural mobility, of masquerade. Though in his case, the mask is seemingly the Canadian mask worn over an essentially American identity.

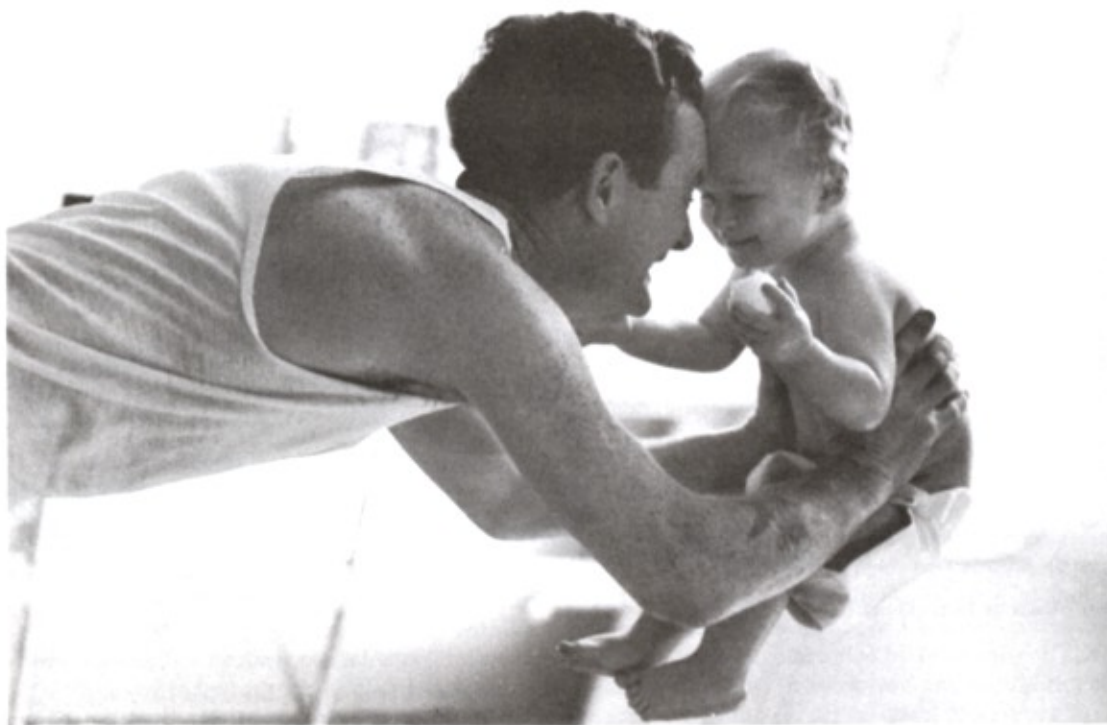
3. Though arguably this can only be the culmination of a process. Like women whose entire history of filmgoing has been one of seeing men's films and find feminist cinema 'difficult,' Canadians have also been masquerading for too long. Geoff Pevere's comments that his students found Canadian cinema the strangest, the most difficult, is typical.

4. Benedict Anderson has defined a nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson 1983: 15). Our inability to imagine community is the reason why as Anthony Wilden has emphatically stated "Canada is not yet a nation" (Wilden 1981: 52) and is perhaps the impetus for our perennial questioning of Where is Here?



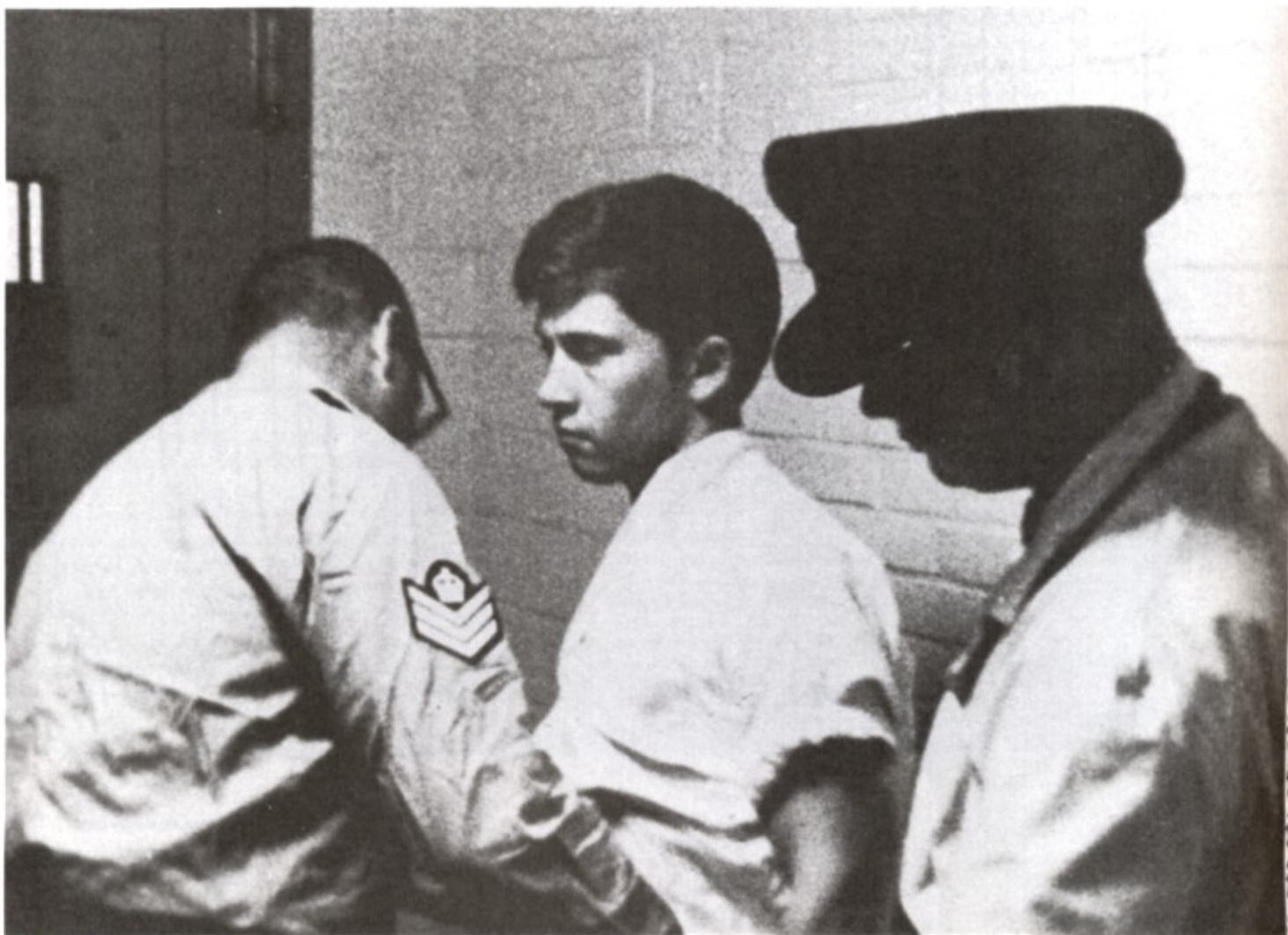
Goin' Down the Road by Don Shebib
Pour la Suite du Monde by Pierre Perrault





The Things I Cannot Change
by Kathleen Shannon

Nobody Waved Goodbye
by Don Owen



concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing (1990: 19).

If these are indeed some of the results of engagement with theories of postmodernism and postmodernity, these latter are popular in Canada because, up to a certain point, they attempt to describe our context and make meaning within it. West's distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are strikingly similar to what Harcourt hopes cognitivism will contribute to Canada. Yet, in the conclusion to *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell acknowledges that his theory "will of course not answer broader cultural, economic, or ideological questions about the filmmaking institution" (Bordwell 1985: 335). But these questions are crucial in order to fulfill Harcourt's aspirations, and indeed my own, for the study of cinema in Canada. Bordwell adds that his theory "does not address issues such as sexuality and fantasy" (335), the latter I would think crucial to any account of Canadian spectatorship of American film, and really, spectatorship in general.

Documentary and experimental cinema, historically dominant modes in Canada, are tangential to Bordwell's oeuvre and are discussed together in a section of *Film Art* titled 'Nonnarrative Formal System,' a rather inappropriate heading under which to discuss films like *The River* and *Olympia*. Moreover, except for a discussion of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, again in *Film Art*, Bordwell makes no mention of Canadian film. His theory does not take into consideration factors which, as I tried to show above are crucial to the study of cinema in Canada. Indeed he sees methodological categories such as that of nation to be "hackneyed" (Bordwell 1983: 15). Maybe Bordwell's usefulness to us lies in his method rather than in his scope.

BASIS AND METHOD

Bordwell's approach may be seen as a reaction to the confusion that reigned in film studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. To this day there is no widespread agreement within the discipline as to what constitutes appropriate tools for analysis. Subsequently, literary theory, feminism, psychoanalysis, anthropology, marxism, formalism, linguistics, cognitive psychology and semiology are often drawn upon as a grab-bag of ideas sometimes indiscriminately utilized without care for internal inconsistencies or contradictory theoretical underpinnings. Harcourt has written that by the 1980s, the American Society for Cinema studies, "had become a show-place for scholarly exhibitionism and a marketplace for the writers of the next fashionable academic text" (Harcourt 1988: 23). At the same time there was seemingly a striving for a comprehensive theory of cinema which would include every other art form remotely connected with it and every facet of the human condition.

It is in this context that Bordwell argued that, "no single theory can answer all the questions that one may want to ask. At this point in the history of film study, we are best served

by framing limited questions" (Bordwell 1983: 7). An important springboard from which Bordwell began framing is Russian formalism. In "Lowering the Stakes: Prospects for a Historical Poetics of Cinema" Bordwell noted that, "another film student, with different frames of reference, could construct another 'Formalist theory' than the one I propose" (1983: 8). However, since he later berated Barry King for relying on Jameson's account of Russian Formalism in *The Prison House of Language*, which he judged unsound and outdated (Bordwell 1988: 7), I will limit the following account to Bordwell's own version.

Bordwell's application of formalism to film as explicated in "Lowering the Stakes" revolves around four questions:

1. What are the properties and functions of film form, especially in its aesthetic aspects?
2. What aspects of the spectator's activity can be explained with reference to film form?
3. How may we analyze films in order to bring their formal operations to light?
4. How may we situate film form and spectatorial activity in historical terms? (1983: 7)

Bordwell assumes that film is internally systemic. He denies a form/content split and argues that formalists insisted on the determining role of formal construction, the relation among parts. No one element could be studied outside its relation to the rest of the work. **In this light, content is merely those materials necessary to achieve an overall formal purpose.**

Though every element has a function, not all elements are equal. Each film has a dominant element or overriding quality. A film establishes its own internal norms and then tends to violate them. There are likewise external norms. No single film can be studied outside its relation to other films. A film operates within cinema as a macrosystem and the individual work is understood as a distinct, potentially oppositional system. It is a dynamic conception of norm through which general relational principles such as defamiliarization, dominant, system, function, background, foreground, *syuzhet/fabula* (roughly plot/story) are utilized as tools for analysis.

Bordwell distinguishes between narrative and narration. The former implies an abstract, fixed structure, a product; the latter is a process through which the narrative comes to be represented. According to Bordwell, "the Formalist tradition sees narration as the process whereby a text is 'made strange,' disrupting the expectations of normal communication" (1979b: 2). Perception is crucial to the process. But in Bordwell's opinion the formalists never provided a clear account of it (1983: 11). In order to answer questions of spectatorial activity, Bordwell resorts to cognitivism.

'Cognitivist science' is a psychological model based on empirical investigations of the mind and the brain that is often set explicitly against psychoanalysis. Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, cognitivism focuses on normative behaviour and rational activity, particularly as it pertains to the intentional act and goal orientation. Bordwell does not dismiss psychoanalysis but argues that, "I see no reason to claim for the unconscious any activities which can be explained on other grounds" (1985: 30). Cognitivism investigates compre-

hension: Bordwell insists that it is "not a hermeneutic grid: it cannot be allegorized" (Bordwell 1989: 17). Dudley Andrew, in an introduction to a special issue of *Iris* on 'Cinematic and Cognitive Psychology' explains that "it will not do to proclaim *ex cathedra* that perception, or the apparatus, is ideological through and through. We can and must devise experiments that will test universality at various levels. This is among the first principles of cognitivism" (Andrew 1989: 4). Great emphasis is put on testing, offering proof, and Andrew warns that "cognitivists will haughtily demand of opposing paradigms that they support their claims, whenever possible, with empirical evidence" (1989: 3). Andrew further argues that cognitivism is not positivist because it is a constructivist account — mental structures interact with information pickup to create meaning. A summary of Bordwell's account of spectatorial activity in *Narration in the Fiction Film* will help illustrate the process.

Bordwell posits a viewer who is a hypothetical entity executing the operations necessary to construct a story out of the film's representations. Perceiving and thinking are goal-oriented processes. Perception and cognition are not easily separated. The typical act of perception is the identification of a three-dimensional world on the basis of cues. Perception becomes a process of active hypothesis-testing. Cognition processes help frame and fix perceptual hypotheses by reckoning in probabilities weighted to the situation and to prior knowledge. Typical cognitive activities depend on inferential processes. Organized clusters of knowledge called schemata guide our hypothesis making. Schemata may be of various kinds — prototypes, templates, or procedural patterns.

In "A Case for Cognitivism" (1989) Bordwell specifies that perception and cognition are related by 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processes which operate simultaneously to help create meaning. The former refers to fast, mandatory activities that are data-driven and usually sensory. The latter are concept-driven and more deliberate, like problem-solving and abstract judgment. Both manifest inference-making and both go beyond the information given. Bordwell's description of the activities of a film spectator are worth quoting at length.

In our culture, the perceived of a narrative film comes armed and active to the task. She or he takes as a central goal the carving out of an intelligible story. To do this the perceived applies narrative schemata which define narrative events and unify them by principles of causality, time and space. Prototypical story components and the structural schema of the 'canonical story' assist in this effort to organize the material presented. In the course of constructing the story the perceiver uses schemata and incoming cues to make assumptions, draw inferences about current story events, and frame and test hypotheses about prior and upcoming events (1985: 38-39).

With this basis, the formalist component of Bordwell's approach (he insists on this term to distinguish it from Grand Theory (Bordwell 1988: 83)) can then be easily integrated,

this material is organized into a syuzhet which cues the spectator to construct a fabula according to schemata of

logic, time and space. Film style usually supports the compositionally motivated. The Constructivist approach treats the perceiver as constantly active — applying structures, testing and revising procedures for making sense of the material. Crucial points in the process are the syuzhet's presentation of gaps in fabula information, major temporal schemata in narrative [include] 1-2-3 order and conventional relations of syuzhet and fabula duration. Space can also be considered from a Constructivist standpoint (1985: 100).

Bordwell's account is an attempt at delineating a historical poetics of cinema — "the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effect" (1989: 266-2167). Along with his engagement with form is a simultaneous call for a move away from interpretation and a reliance on textual analysis as an important type of evidence.

There are several problems and contradictions with Bordwell's approach. Though he repeatedly calls for mid-level research (1989b: 33), Bordwell's own projects are sweeping in scope. In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, for example, he offers a model of narration that cuts through genre, history and national boundaries, attempting explanations of narration in the classical film, the detective film, the melodrama, Art-cinema narration, Godard, Soviet historical-materialist film, and other forms. *Making Meaning*, to quote the description on its jacket, "is at once a history of film criticism, an analysis of how critics interpret film, and a proposal for an alternative program for film studies." These are hardly modest projects.

Much of *Making Meaning* is a critique of interpretation. Bordwell's critique is almost the reverse of Sontag's polemic which argued that interpretation got in the way of our understanding of art and that we should replace hermeneutics with an erotics of art (Sontag 64: 15). For Bordwell, a hermeneutic is acceptable if interpretation is, "at the service of more global investigations of conventions of filmic structure and function" (271).

Bordwell acknowledges the premise that, "if no knowledge is direct, all knowledge derives from 'interpretation' (1990: 2). He draws a distinction between comprehension and interpretation. The former concerns itself with apparent, manifest, or direct meaning that the film 'speaks directly,' while the latter is concerned with revealing nonobvious meaning. Defined in this way, the notion of interpretation becomes more manageable if not entirely deproblematized. For example, he never deals adequately with the problem of translation across media. One can't quote a film in print. Every attempt to write about film is a process of selection. Even if one were to limit oneself to description, one can't describe an entire film. There would still have to be a selection which may be different than someone else's. I will refer the reader to Victor Perkins' "Must We Say What We Mean" for an excellent critique of various problems in Bordwell's account and limit myself here to quoting two that are of direct concern. First of all Bordwell never specifies what it would mean for a fiction film to speak directly. Secondly, though Bordwell argues against symptomatic interpretation, *Making Meaning* is itself

such an exercise. According to Perkins, the book surveys, "what critics do when they produce interpretations — rather than what they imagine or declare themselves to do" (1990: 3).

The four questions that Bordwell sees formalism answering are indeed limited. Though questions of form should be central, a study of film that revolved only around form would be an impoverished one. Yet even, by his own criteria, the answers to Bordwell's own questions are incomplete, inadequate, and reductive. For example, Bordwell's formalism takes into account space, time, the relations of the shot, framing, and editing, i.e., elements that are easily distinguishable, less amenable to interpretation, to some extent measurable and that easily lend themselves to textual analysis. Bordwell insists that, "All Formalists insisted on the determining role of formal construction, the relation among parts. Any element, no matter how arresting, could not be studied outside of its relations with the other components in the work" (Bordwell 1983: 9). Yet, he does exactly that. Actors are a crucial component of why some fiction films are even made, how they are constructed and how they are consumed. In some cases a particular star persona is foregrounded, the dominant element in a film, a key aid to viewer comprehension, the film's *raison d'être*. Yet, I have found no discussion of this in Bordwell's oeuvre. If one element can't be studied outside its relation with the others this is an omission which seriously puts into question his discussion of the fiction film.

Since an analysis of 'what are the properties and functions of film form, especially in its aesthetic aspects' is the number one question in Bordwell's formalism, it is unfortunate that his frame of reference rarely exceeds films of the 1960s. Surely the arrival of video as a new form of delivery for fiction films has revived old questions and raised new ones. Are the formal properties of a film the same when shown on video? Space, time, cinematography and relations between shots don't change much. Our construction of a fabula could be affected by the ways in which scale affects our perception of *syuzhet*. More importantly, the very material basis of the form changes from imprints of light on celluloid to magnetically coded information on tape. Some films are even made strictly for consumption on video.

What are the formal properties of an 'object' that takes on different forms, that is sometimes ten feet high and sometimes ten inches, that is sometimes an uninterrupted flow and can sometimes be forwarded or rewound? How do these changes affect narrative construction and aesthetics? Maybe they don't. Maybe one can argue that they are different media. But if so I think an explanation needs to be offered as to how *syuzhet* and fabula construction often remain the same across these media. How does the intermingling circulation of films from various nations, of different 'modes' and genres affect the notion of norm? In terms of aesthetics, maybe one can argue that a video is like a colour reproduction of a painting and need not affect discussions of the aesthetics of the work in question. Perhaps. Nevertheless I think these questions are crucial to Bordwell's enquiry and need to be addressed.

Bordwell has argued that "it is evident from the start Russian Formalist theory is grounded in history" (Bordwell

1983: 14). But Bordwell's version of history is a curious one that takes some (very little) consideration of cultural factors,⁵ mostly as restricted to form, and excludes wider cultural, social, and political factors that may also affect form. Indeed a dominant analytic tool in *Narration in the Fiction Film* is the concept of mode of narration. Bordwell distinguishes between genre and mode as follows, "A genre varies significantly between periods and social formations; a mode tends to be more fundamental, less transient, and more pervasive. In this spirit, I will consider modes of narration to transcend genres, schools, movements, and entire national cinemas" (Bordwell 1985: 150). Half of *Narration in the Fiction Film* is devoted to an examination of four modes: Classical Narration, Art-Cinema Narration, Historical Materialist Narration and Parametric Narration. All are cross-cultural in conceptualization, though he gives the example of Hollywood with regard to Classical Narration and the Soviet example for Historical-Materialist Narration. The role of specific contexts of production, not to speak of the cultural specificity of the work of Bergman, Fellini and Antonioni, are not seen as important as their similarities. As to Parametric Narration, he writes that it is not linked "to a single national school, period, or genre of filmmaking" (Bordwell 1985: 274). The only claim to history the concept of mode can make is that Bordwell links different films together in time as sharing a mode. From Bordwell one would never guess that cultural specificity, economics, and institutional infrastructures have an effect on film form. Though Bordwell does offer a model of historical change, however limited it is to form, criticism levied against Russian formalists by their contemporaries could just as easily apply to him today. According to Nick Browne, Medvedev and Bakhtin "saw in the assemblage of formalist precepts and methods a resolute exclusion of ideological content and a refusal to acknowledge the social determinations of artistic form and meaning" (1982: 81).

Bordwell has written that "cognitive theories hold that in order to understand human action, we must postulate such entities as perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, intentions, plans, skills, and feelings" (1989: 13). But his own cognitive account of the cinematic spectator excludes beliefs, desires and feelings.⁶ His 'hypothetical spectator' is sexless, raceless, genderless and nationless.

Bordwell continuously argues for the importance of testing against evidence. "There comes a point where a theoretical formulation must not simply cite presuppositions and select privileged instances but test itself against a body of detailed evidence" (Bordwell 1983: 6). Few scholars would argue differently. What they would contest is what constitutes evidence in film studies. Robert Ray forcefully argued, "the most striking thing about Bordwell's argument is how much it resembles Comte's rationale for positivism" (Ray

5. The production context in *Classical Hollywood cinema*, is written by Janet Staiger. In *Narration and the Fiction Film*, Bordwell discusses narration in Godard without talking about the New Wave and the cinematic apparatus in France in the 1950s and 1960s (Bordwell 1985: 274-310). Likewise, a few comments on the rhetorical cast of Soviet art in the 1920s constitute the historical context provided for Soviet Historical-Materialist Narration (Bordwell 1985: 234-273).

6. In *Making Meaning* he includes beliefs but only in the sense of different schema of what critics believe a good film should be.

1988: 156) and that what counts for Bordwell are, "presuppositions confirmed by facts" (Ray 1988: 143).

A key enabling presupposition for Bordwell, one so central that without it his whole account of spectatorial activity falls apart, is Bordwell's view that the central goal of a viewer of a narrative film is "the carving out of an intelligible story" (1985: 38-39). He offers no proof and indeed he would be hard pressed to find it. As any glance at any of the trade papers, film-buff magazines, historical accounts of various kinds, and as our own experience shows, pleasure is not merely an effect of the cinema (Bordwell 1989: 269) but the central goal of going to the movies. Which aspects of film result in pleasure differ from genre to genre, period to period, and within and across national cinemas. For some people pleasure comes from watching certain stars, from seeing the hero and the heroine ride off into the sunset in a Western, from an action scene, from being scared, from getting certain information as in documentary or even as Charlotte Herzog demonstrates, from watching fashions in film (Herzog 1990: 134-159). Comprehension may be a source of pleasure in the cinema but filmic pleasures are not limited to comprehension.

Bordwell notes in regard to the art cinema that, "a banal remark of the 1960s, that such films make you leave the theatre thinking, is not far from the mark" (Bordwell 1985: 209) and that ambiguity either of tale or telling is central to art cinema narration (212). In "Art-Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" he even goes so far as to write, "the slogan of the art cinema might be, 'when in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity'" (Bordwell 1979a: 60). Ambiguity and comprehension are not necessarily contradictory. But Bordwell's description indicates that such ambiguity often results in lack of comprehension: "the narration leaves causes dangling and questions unanswered" (1985: 210); "art films...ask to be puzzled over" (212); "the narration can make such great demands on memory that it may be necessary to see the film more than once" (1985: 213). Of Godard's films, he has written that "they firmly...resist narrative comprehension" (311). If comprehension was its central goal, and much of Bordwell's own description indicate otherwise, the art-cinema audience would be a very frustrated one. I would argue that one of the reasons audiences go to see art cinema is that such ambiguity results in pleasure: sometimes because comprehending what is more difficult to comprehend testifies to their own sophistication; sometimes because the inability to comprehend the film's ambiguity confirms a notion of realism cherished by the audience; sometimes in other ways.

Positing pleasure as the central goal of spectatorial activity results in different questions, messier ones, than those raised by Bordwell. An account of perception and cognition would still be necessary but no longer sufficient. As Laura Mulvey indicates in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," gender and the unconscious then become crucial considerations which can't just be put aside as Bordwell does. Affect would also have to be dealt with. Indeed it seems astonishing that his account leaves it out. Cinema is a medium whose very genres are often named so as to connote affects: thriller, comedy, horror, action, melodrama. But then cognitivist psychology is not very well equipped with what is not strictly rational and logical. Even Bordwell admits that "I suspect psychoana-

lytic models may be well suited for explaining emotional aspects of film viewing" (Bordwell 1985: 30). To paraphrase Bill Nichols' critique of Bordwell (1989: 511), cognitivism has its limits and narrative constantly exceeds them.

Bordwell has argued that he writes about cognitivism from "a position of moderate advocacy" (1989: 12). But in fact his entire theory of the spectator is based on a constructivist model of cognitive science which uses reason and logic to describe mentation as it relates to intention, goals, memory and comprehension. In *Making Meaning* Bordwell argues

in watching an image, we pay attention, make inferences, and perform both voluntary and involuntary perceptual activities that need analyzing and explaining. In following a narrative, we make assumptions and draw on schemata and routines in order to arrive at conclusions about the world of the story. Somehow all this may come out as pleasure, but we scarcely know how (Bordwell 1989: 269-270).

Well, maybe that is how and why Bordwell watches. But what an impoverished experience his is — no affect, no desire, no fantasy. And what an impoverished process he describes — race, sex, gender, and ideology are shunted off to the side; history and context are tokenized. V. F. Perkins has argued that Bordwell draws "on cognitive psychology in some of the more mechanical forms that have developed — as one psychologist puts in — under the spell of physics envy" (1989: 5).

Factors like ideology, pleasure, acting, gender, race, class, and nationality are sometimes difficult to conceptualize and describe, much less measure. But they are part of the experience of watching a film; they affect how we construct a fabula; and an account of narration must take these factors into consideration. Otherwise Bordwell may sometimes find perfect answers to questions. But how useful are they? Not very in general, and even less from a nationalist perspective.

IN A LETTER TO *CINEACTION* Peter Harcourt lashed out against Robin Wood and his followers of what he called their "hosomarxist" ideological position. The moniker was an unfortunate choice. It elided the differences between the Hollywood-fixated, homophiliac, marxist-feminist and imperialistic ideology components the label was meant to (roughly) stand for. However, once I got past my offence, at the moniker, I found Harcourt's point worth considering,

The Hosomarxist position ignores experimental work and documentary work. It ignores the extra-cinematic inflections of ethnicity, economy, local gesture, and indigenous speech. It has never attempted to address the over-coded, over-fabulated cinema of Latin America; and, apparently, it is ill-equipped to address the under-coded, under-fabulated cinema of Australia, of Canada or of Quebec — think of the British "colonies" in fact. Furthermore, it cannot handle — except with contempt — any individual filmic articulation that does not refer in some way to a Hollywood genre (Harcourt 1989: 21).



I agree that such an approach is undesirable, culturally speaking, suicidal really, in Canada. But compare Harcourt's description of the 'homomaxxinist' position to Bill Nichols' assessment of the global level of Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film*.

this is a poetics that excludes more cinema and modes of visual representation than it includes, that neglects differences that make a difference, that achieves coherence by excluding history and subjectivity, that treats narrative as data or information for genderless, classless, stateless "processors,"...For gendered, historically situated subjects whose very being is at stake within the arena of history,

Bordwell's poetics must seem a terribly diminishing thing (Nichols 1989: 513).

The two accounts are extremely similar. Both ignore elements that a study of cinematic culture in Canada needs to take into account: cultural, economic and historical specificity; race, gender, class, ideology, pleasure, desire, fantasy, and modes such as documentary and experimental film to name only a few. I find some of Bordwell's work very useful and all of us can benefit from reading him. I have quoted him on aspects of Classical Hollywood Cinema, the 'primacy effect' and the function of the auteur. I hope, however, that his influence here does not extend much beyond that. As a Canadian film



Neighbours



La Region Centrale
by Michael Snow

scholar interested in Canadian cinematic culture, I find little that is encouraging in Bordwell's approach. The characteristics Harcourt attributes to the cognitivists are a wish to be desired. But ultimately no one but ourselves will be able to fulfill it.

RAISING THE STAKES — A BRIEF NOTE ON PROSPECTS FOR THE STUDY OF A CANADIAN CINEMATIC CULTURE

The great loss within the situation is that an entire era of Canadian film, including experimental film, has not been preserved within our culture. It is not even known by many young instructors teaching today. It should play, at regular intervals, in our art galleries and museums. It should have found a home within the curricula of our schools and universities.

— Peter Harcourt, "The Education We Need" (1988: 23)

Much of our anguished speculation about national identity, national culture in general and national cinema in particular revolved around our perception of lacks and the resulting sense of loss. The famed debate around 'The Cinema We Need' instigated by Bruce Elder⁷ is an example. The argument is implicit in the title. There is an ideal cinema that's better for us than any other but we do not have it. The title is explicitly prescriptive and predicated on lack. Examining what we lack is important as a starting point but self-flagellating if an end in itself. I think that in order to arrive at a new dialectic juncture we have to balance what we lack by paying equal attention to what we have.

At the risk of sounding reductive, I would like to venture that film studies in Canada can be divided into two broad streams: one has looked primarily at Canadian cinema almost exclusively; the other has looked at foreign cinema, mostly American, as if our viewing of them was unmediated by our national identity and our national culture. I place high value on the former. It has been concerned with what we have from the perspective of where we are and has produced most of what writings on Canadian cinema we have. But I think both approaches bypass an examination of our national film culture which deny our experience as active historical viewers.

In "The Concept of National Cinema" Andrew Higson argues that, "the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood's international domination" (1990: 37). I think this has been true in Canada as well. But the fact that most Canadians don't see Canadian cinema does not mean that our national cinema and our national film culture are binary opposites. And it does not mean that Canadians who enjoy American cinema are passive dupes of imperial ideology. The fact is that we don't know how we see, how we comprehend, or how we might interpret.

7. The entire debate which includes articles by Bruce Elder, Bart Testa, Michael Dorland, Peter Harcourt, Geoff Pevere and Piers Handling is reprinted in Alan Fotheringham's *Documents in Canadian film*.

I think film studies in Canada should concern itself with, among other things, how we see, what we see and what we make. They are all inter-related questions. How we see depends on what we see and influences what we make. The hegemonic position of Hollywood cinema here creates norms for viewing that influences the types of films we make, how we make them and how we see them. Peter Harcourt has written that, "If we are Nationalists and believe in ourselves as Canadians, the American product really is the enemy" (Harcourt 1975: 165). In a sense he is right. American movies and the American film system in Canada create barriers to us watching Canadian films. But to the extent we have internalized American movies, it is a very unproductive attitude. We have enough complexes without also characterising part of our cultural history as 'the enemy within.' I grew up with American movies. I love them. They are part of my culture as a Canadian. For me the point is not to avoid American cinema but to examine its role in Canada from a Canadian perspective. To study Canadian cinema in isolation from Canadian cinematic culture can at best result in a partial understanding.

Susan Barrowclough has written that national cinemas are motivated by a "prime desire to participate in a problematical process of struggle for nationhood, national culture and a search for identity" (1982: 5). These are crucial concerns to a colonized country and testify to the centrality our cinema should have within our curriculum. But our national cinema should be studied within the context of our national culture (which would take into consideration both sites of production and consumption) and with the understanding that the notion of national, necessary as I think it is at the moment, is innately as much a process denying difference as it is of finding similarity.

The arguments in this article have been framed as much by Peter Harcourt as by Bordwell. In spite of my disagreements with Harcourt, the numerous times I quote him testify to how productive his work has been to my thinking. In this light, my critique of Bordwell should not be construed as an attack on what is foreign. If each theory or model is shaped by its object of study, wholesale applications of foreign theories would be foolish. But different approaches will offer different theoretical tools that will invariably illuminate aspects of our cinematic culture. But in terms of Canadian cinematic culture, my object of study, Harcourt's work has proven more fecund than Bordwell's, however exalted his international reputation. In film studies too it is well to begin with what we have.

Part of what we have when watching a film is our knowledge of who we are and where we are from and a lifetime experience watching a cinema that gives us great pleasure without addressing itself to our particular context. We also have a cinema that does address it, sometimes brilliantly, but which most of us don't watch. I think this can be a productive starting point for investigating Canadian cinema and Canadian cinematic culture. The aim is not to lower the stakes but to raise them high enough to be worth staking at all.

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José Arroyo is presently pursuing a doctorate in Communications at Simon Fraser University. He has published widely in the area of Canadian film.

Cameron Bailey is a Toronto writer and film critic. He is currently serving as programme co-ordinator for the Festival of Festivals' *Perspective Canada* series.

Kass Banning is a Toronto freelance critic and lecturer in film who teaches at the Ontario College of Art.

Barbara Evans is a filmmaker who teaches in the Film and Video Department at York University. Her films include: *Prairie Women*, *In Her Chosen Field*, and *Jessie's Album*. She is currently working on a feature length documentary *Heaven on Earth — A History of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation*.

Scott Forsyth teaches in the Film and Video Department at York University.

Kieran Keohane is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at York University.

Brenda Longfellow is a professor of Film Studies at York University's Atkinson College. Her last film, *Our Marilyn*, won several awards and she has just finished her first feature film entitled *Gerda*.

William D. MacGillivray is a renowned Canadian filmmaker who resides in Halifax. His feature films include: *Stations*, *Life Classes*, *I Will Not Make Anymore Boring Art*, *The Vacant Lot*, and *Understanding Bliss*.

Chantale Nadeau is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the Université de Montréal. She has published on gender, popular film and women's cinema. She was recently awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship from SSHRC to pursue research on lesbian representations and the construction of sexual alterity in the cinema at Pittsburgh University this fall.

Geoff Pevere is a film critic and former programmer for the Toronto Festival of Festivals. He currently hosts *Prime Time*, a national CBC Radio program about media and popular culture.

Olivia Riochet is a French film critic and doctoral candidate in Cinema Studies at the Sorbonne.

Will Straw is an assistant professor and programme co-ordinator of Film Studies in the School for Art and Culture at Carleton University.



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